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Constance Crowley Bowles

A CALIFORNIA HERITAGE:
THE BOWLES COLLECTION OF 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH PORCELAIN

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess
1992-1993

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Interviewed 1992-1993 by Suzanne B. Riess. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY--Constance Crowley Bowles

Constance Crowley Bowles is a San Franciscan with attachments, like an urban Ramona, to a largely long-past California. Her father, Tom Crowley, was the determined Irish "King of Tugs," in the business of water transportation on the West Coast since the Alaska gold rush of 1898, owner of the Crowley Launch and Tugboat Co. Her late husband Henry Miller Bowles's legacy of responsibility to the rich Miller & Lux landholdings in the Central Valley determined his career, and the possibilities in their life together.

Connie Bowles looks at California with a familiarity that is well grounded. Her father owned East and West Marin Islands in the San Francisco Bay. As a child she and her two sisters and her brother had weekends to swim and fish and actually live on their very own islands, in what must indeed have felt like their own bay. With marriage her sense of home expanded to include endless acres of Central Valley ranch land, a vast preserve where she still enjoys gardening and harvesting and hunting, as well as sharing in the responsibility of management.

An oral history with Constance Crowley Bowles was proposed as a way to get on record the history of the Bowles Porcelain Collection, a treasury of 18th-century English porcelain, mostly Chelsea and Worcester pieces, that is the central endowment of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor's Bowles Gallery. Connie wished to work with the Regional Oral History Office to tape-record her memories of the development of the collection, recollections that also were memories of her marriage to Henry, and their years together. The story that she tells starts with her own family history, and the charms of growing up on Russian Hill. The threads of responsiveness to art and the out-of-doors, and appetite for beautiful things, weave together in a way that in hindsight might predict the Bowles Collection, and the life that Constance Bowles lives.

"Connie" is what I felt free to call her. She maintains the name Constance Crowley Bowles on her stationery--it is her identity. Henry Miller Bowles died in 1981, and Connie's marriage to James D. Hart, Professor of American Literature at UC Berkeley, and Director of The Bancroft Library, ended with his death in 1990. In 1992 she became the wife of San Francisco attorney--and not incidentally garden-lover and horticulturist--Julian Peabody. But "Connie" it is.

After an introductory pre-interview meeting with Connie I returned to my desk in the Regional Oral History Office with two massive "catalogues" of the Bowles Collection, thick binders with color prints from slides of the pieces in the collection, and identifying information on each piece, description, marks, history, where purchased, when, how much, and estimated current value. I read the text, steeped myself in the pictures, took note of questions about porcelain, issues of fabricating and identifying. I

also read catalogues about other porcelain collections and collectors, and thought about collecting as a theme and as a state of mind.

The first two recorded interviews, mostly about Crowley and Bowles family history, took place in the conference room of The Bancroft Library, a place of memories and friendships for Connie. Both she and Henry had been members of the Council of Friends of The Bancroft Library. We looked into the office that had been her late husband Jim Hart's, and we were surrounded by the pictorial collection which they had talked about. Over bag lunches, tape-recorder running, Connie told the often-emotional story of her family and her upbringing. And then of Henry's family and their marriage.

On the third interview we began to talk about the collection, as much as possible piece by piece, often looking at the binders of photographs of the collection. But we were also using the pieces to talk more generally about the people who were the antique porcelain dealers, here in San Francisco, and in New York and London, and about the other collectors, and about the whys and wherefores of collecting.

Two of the interviews were held at Connie Bowles's and Julian Peabody's home in San Francisco's Pacific Heights, the house she lived in with Henry. The house could have overwhelmed, like a museum, but instead it is a series of beautiful bright spaces with what seem, aesthetically, to be "just enough" books--finely-bound treasures from printing houses that interested Henry and Connie--and paintings and family photographs of children and grandchildren. And, of course, porcelain.

Since the Bowles Collection is now in crates awaiting placement in its future quarters in the renovated Palace of the Legion of Honor, Connie is living with far less of the 18th century around her than she did when she and Henry were at home together. Although the upstairs library is largely of books about porcelain, and there are scattered porcelain bowls holding seasonal flowers and fruit from the Los Banos ranch, and here and there dishes to look at and pick up and drink tea from, still the great treat is the breakfast room gallery where one sees the perfectly-balanced display of Chelsea botanical plates.

Admiring Connie's breakfast-room gallery, one might contrast it with the fondness in Europe in the 18th century for whole rooms of porcelain, vast vase-lined rooms. Certainly now we would think that much too much. But I mention it because understanding the people for whom the china was made and how they lived with it is important to Connie. She wants the visitors to the Bowles Porcelain Gallery to be able to imagine the life of England in the 18th century. She feels a kindred soul to the earlier collectors who were alive to the enjoyment of the pieces, and moved emotionally by color and workmanship, as she is. The reader of the oral history will enjoy hearing Connie talk about her favorites, admiring the abbreviated brush stroke of the artist who puts a bird against a cloud with a wisp of glaze, or surrounds the dark brown bear with rich blue glaze.

Raymond Yarbrough, a friend of Connie Bowles's, and with Henry Miller Bowles one of the founders of the San Francisco Ceramic Circle, wrote about the Bowles Collection in Antiques and Fine Arts magazine (see pps. 138a-g of the oral history). The metaphor in Mr. Yarbrough's article is the sport, the "game plan," of collecting. Connie would agree that it was sport, with all the elements of the hunt and the capture. An interesting characterization in the oral history is of the part each of the player-sportsmen took, with Henry tracking the kill from the comfort of his office--wry insights from Connie's experience about men and women and collecting.

Early in the interview Connie says, speaking about her choices in collecting, "I like things that have color." She too is colorful, a pleasure to look at, and visits to her house never gave enough time to roam around and look at how the light fell on painted walls, or to sink into cushioned comfort and read the handsome books, or take in the garden and the seigniorial view of the bay. Connie's personality includes a mix of girlish modesty and grownup pleasure with herself and her accomplishments. A determined woman, her father's daughter, she stood by her frankness in the oral history, although when she was given the transcript to edit and review she did polish the language a bit.

There is a lot to learn in the following pages about collecting 18th-century English porcelain, and about the benefactors of the Bowles Porcelain Gallery. There is also much to learn for the social historian and the historian of California. Here is the spirit of the native-born and bred San Franciscans who captured an earlier civilization, crated it and brought it home--to the land of tugboats and ranches and romance--and then gave it to the public.

The reader may wish to consult the catalogue of the University of California's holdings in oral history for other memoirs of San Francisco families. Related series include Business, Fine Printing, Diverse Memoirs, Land Use and Conservation, the Arts, and the California Jewish Community. Tom Crowley, Sr., and Tom Crowley, Jr. have been interviewed in the San Francisco Maritime History Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, and is an administrative division of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

December 13, 1993
Berkeley California

Suzanne B. Riess
Senior Editor

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name CONSTANCE CROWLEY BOWLES

Date of birth JAN. 3, 1919 Birthplace S.F.

Father's full name THOMAS CROWLEY

Occupation SHIPPING Birthplace S.F.

Mother's full name LOUISE GADE CROWLEY

Occupation WIFE Birthplace S.F.

Your spouse 1 HENRY M. BOWLES 2 JAMES D. HART

Your children BEATRICE BOWLES, HENRY M. BOWLES JR.
PHILIP ERNEST BOWLES

Where did you grow up? S.F.

Present community S.F.

Education KATHERINE DELMAR BURKE SCHOOL
SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

Occupation(s)

Areas of expertise 18th C. ENGLISH PORCELAIN

Other interests or activities DRY FLY FISHING, GARDENING
SKIING, SHOOTING, BOOK COLLECTING

Organizations in which you are active TRUSTEE FINE ARTS MUSEUM
C.H.S. FRANCISCA CLUB

I EARLY YEARS, THE CROWLEY FAMILY

[Interview 1: May 6, 1992] ##

Mother, and Christian Science

Riess: In the oral history with your brother Tom there is a nice family picture.[1] Your sisters were considerably older than you? You were born in 1919.

Bowles: Yes, I'm the baby. My oldest sister is nine years older and the other one is eight years older. It's more of a difference when you reach this age than it was early on

Riess: Tell me about your mother [Louise Birdie Gade Crowley].

Bowles: Oh, she was an incredible person. I find it hard to talk about her, actually. [voice breaking] She was [crying] dear, remarkable.

She was interested in all the arts. She was very liberated, for a woman of that age. I remember when she cut her hair, bobbed her hair, we thought it was pretty modern.

Riess: Did your father disapprove when she did that?

Bowles: No, he rather liked it. They actually had a very interesting relationship. I always thought they were fond of one another, but it was volatile. There were many disagreements.

---

[1] Thomas B. Crowley, Crowley Maritime Corporation: San Francisco Bay Tugboats to International Maritime Fleet, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1983.

Riess: She was quite independent?

Bowles: She was very independent, yes, she was, in an odd way. It was so remarkable to me that she could be so strong. But she was the one that really introduced us to [voice breaks again]--I don't know why it's so hard for me to talk about her! This is really foolish.

Riess: No, it's not. But I could change the subject. It almost makes me feel tearful.

Bowles: Oh, dear. [laughs] Well, she was also lots of fun. She was very upbeat, and very enthusiastic. Oh, heavens. She was just--[cries]

Riess: She was born in San Francisco?

Bowles: Right.

Riess: Do you know how she and your father met?

Bowles: I never did find out, but I understand--and I hardly can believe this--but I understand that they met at a church social. I've never seen my father in church ever, so I can't imagine that that was true, but that's what they told us. I tried to visualize it and I never could.

My mother was a Christian Scientist, and my father had been a Catholic. He was never a very good Catholic, I guess, because he was interested in Christian Science, but he didn't go to church. So I can't imagine, as I say, how they could have met at a church social. But it made a good story, and I think they probably thought it sounded very well to us. But that was all I remember hearing.

Riess: That's funny, because Christian Scientists don't have church socials.

Bowles: [laughing] I know, and so it doesn't make any sense. The only thing I did hear was that the first time he came to call--she apparently lived in a little alleyway that's now called Jessie Street on the other side of Market Street, which was very humiliating, we weren't supposed to hear about that--but he apparently hired a carriage and four horses to go down and pick her up, and he got down the little alley and he couldn't turn around! [laughter] I always thought that was a marvelous story.

She came from, as I understood it, quite a refined family, and my father was from an Irish Catholic family, which everyone

sort of looked down on anyway. It wasn't in any way stylish. I think that socially, if you can say there was a difference, I would have said that she came from a much better background than he did.

I think that his background was pretty crude, and there was very little of the arts or anything in his life that I knew about. That was what she brought to him that I always felt was so important, because he did develop a taste for art, and a little bit of music. I think that that was what he saw in her that he appreciated, and I always felt that that was something between them that was rather interesting.

Riess: What brought her family to San Francisco?

Bowles: I really have no idea. They were very sketchy about everything like that. It was embarrassing, because they'd been so poor, and to be poor was just something humiliating, as my father never let her forget.

Riess: Poor and yet the right values, the arts and all of that.

Bowles: I thought so. She was a really fine person.

Riess: The Irish Catholic part of it, going to Mass, you didn't do that?

Bowles: Well, no. My mother was absolutely dead set against the Catholic church, in a way; just the whole idea of Catholicism she thought was so Medieval, and just ignorant.

Riess: And he was ready to leave it?

Bowles: Oh, apparently he really was, yes. I don't think he'd ever been very religious to begin with, but his mother was quite a strong personality, and was very Irish, and she had three Irish children around her--he had several step-brothers that I think were Catholics. I think that that was another thing that my mother brought into his life, the idea that you could be free, you didn't have to have a structured religion.

I think she took up Christian Science simply because it was so sort of avant-garde for those days. She liked everything about it, that it was healthy, and she believed in eating properly and that sort of tied in. Everything that Christian Science said--that you shouldn't be sick, because if you took care of yourself you wouldn't be sick, if you ate properly, and all that sort of thing--it just tied in with her whole feeling and outlook.

So we all grew up going to Christian Science Sunday school actually, Tom too. We often ducked out, but we did go, and I think it's made a deep impression on all of our lives.

Riess: It's so interesting to think of the power of that religion at that time, and people's openness to it.

Bowles: They really were ready for something that was not so structured and not so dogmatic. That you were a sinner to begin with, and you were always going to be a sinner, waa--still is--the Catholic faith.

Riess: Were there stories of healings in the family? Was the Christian Science put to that test?

Bowles: It was more of a mental thing. I think it was something that they needed emotionally, and nobody was ever very sick. But then when my mother did finally die of cancer everyone said, "Oh, well, that's because she was a Christian Scientist." Well, whether it was or wasn't didn't matter, because I think that she probably had cancer where it was never going to be reached in any case.

But it really had no connection with the physical, except that she felt that your mental attitude had so much to do with your physical being, and that's why the diet and everything else was so important. I think that as far as a real healing, a physical healing, I don't think anyone really ever had to look for that. Except that something much deeper, which I don't know whether I should mention here or not, but I think that it had a lot to do with it: my father was an alcoholic.

Father, Tom Crowley

Bowles: I think that [Christian Science] was very helpful to her in order to deal with that problem. And of course, it made it very unpleasant for us at times. But he was the most peculiar alcoholic that you could ever imagine, because he would go for two or three years seemingly absolutely normal, and then I don't know, we never knew what it was, but something would just take him off, and it was simply terrible. It was really severe. He'd have to be hospitalized and all that sort of thing, and that was a terrible strain for her.

What I'm saying is that Christian Science I think helped her mentally to deal with this, because it was a very difficult

ordeal. It was awfully hard for us too, because he seemed so perfectly fine, until this would happen.

Riess: In these two or three year periods he would drink but it would be under control?

Bowles: No, he would have nothing. He would absolutely have nothing. That was what was so curious.

Riess: It was his own discipline?

Bowles: Apparently. We would never have cocktails in the house, we never had wine with dinner, ever. And, in fact, we did very little entertaining, and I think it was really because of that, because we really couldn't offer anyone a cocktail, because we never had them. Mother did not drink either.

Everything is a contradiction, I suppose. Though I remember distinctly one time--I'm probably rambling a little bit--one time my sisters, who were considerably older, wanted to have a party. We also lived at the end of an alley, so to speak, up on Russian Hill, because it was a dead-end street, a little short street off Vallejo. They--I don't know how they ever did it, but my father brought in some kind of a big bar that must have come from a boat or something, with a brass rail on it. It must have been during Prohibition, now that I think about it.

It was a beautiful night, and all these young people--they couldn't have been more than eighteen or nineteen--had every kind of a drink that you could imagine, and it was a wild party. And here it was my father who put that on! It seemed such a terrible contradiction.

But that was, I think, one of the reasons that my mother turned to Christian Science. Maybe she knew it early on. I don't know that. But it was a huge problem in all of our lives, and I think affected all of us emotionally. I'm not really crushed by it, but I think it was hard to deal with, very hard.

You know, when somebody you really loved was like that, it was just so unattractive, compared to the way he had been, that it was just hard to accept.

Riess: Where would one be hospitalized to treat alcoholism?

Bowles: Oh, there were all kinds of places, if you knew the right doctors. In those days, if you had enough money, you sent them to Dante Sanitarium, at Van Ness and Broadway, which was very fancy, and they'd be down there being taken care of. I guess they gave them

pills of sorts, but all they could do was just kind of deal with them. I guess they gave them things to drink too--I don't really know.

But it took a long time for him to come out of it, and then when he would he'd come home, and that was even worse because he'd be really nervous, and you had to deal with that. You'd have to sit and play cards with him--I've always loathed cards. He'd pace the floor--it was horrible. The aftermath was worse than when he started.

I'm not trying to sound sorry for myself, but as I look back, it was a very unpleasant thing to go through. But I still feel I had a marvelous, happy life, so I guess it wasn't--.

Riess: I think now there are better treatments available.

Bowles: They didn't have any treatments then at all. In fact, my father would come back and I'd hear him say to my mother, "You know, they gave me some kind of dope," he'd call it, "and it was so terrible. Don't ever let them do that again, because it's the worst feeling. It's just terrible." And I guess he found it far worse than alcohol.

But yes, as you say--. And it was so humiliating. And you couldn't tell anyone. To this day Tom and I, it's only been in the last ten years we've even been able to talk about it, because it was such a serious thing. And Tom never took a drink until he was fifty, because of it.

Riess: There's a fear.

Bowles: Oh, it's a terrible fear, and it's so humiliating, and such a--and it was so dreadful, it was similar to people having cancer. You didn't talk about that either. It was as though you had the plague or something. Now today everybody's telling you everything they have. [laughs] Maybe too much, more than you want to hear!

Riess: There wasn't a sophistication about psychology, and so one didn't have a way of talking about some things.

Bowles: No, that's very true, and in fact the first books on psychology that we had I think were when my children were little, and by [Arnold L.] Gesell, I think it was?

Riess: The child psychologist.

Bowles: That's right, and that was the first thing I ever even knew about psychology. It was not the first thing I knew, but it was

certainly a beginning of psychology. I really didn't know much about it. I don't know whether you could have done much about it anyway, but I think that psychology has been a marvelous thing, I really approve of it. I think it's still in its infancy, but I think it's done great things for people, I really do.

Riess: Your mother turned to Christian Science after they married, or was she already in it?

Bowles: I think she must have turned to it after they were married, yes. I don't think she--I think she may have known that he drank a little, but I don't think she knew how severe the problem was.

She was a marvelous wife to him, she really was very devoted. And I think they were devoted to each other, they actually were. But the Christian Science came about because of the alcohol; I really think that. She would go to those Wednesday meetings sometimes, where people got up and talked, but I don't think she ever did. She wasn't brave enough, I guess.

Father's World, Opinions

Bowles: Also, it curtailed her social life, because she couldn't really entertain. Dad had his world, his business world, which of course he was very absorbed in, and so she was often sort of left out of things, because she didn't have a life, really. It was hard. She had a few lady friends, and that was about it.

My father was also sort of peculiar, I thought, [laughs] because he'd go out all the time. Monday night he'd go someplace, I guess it was to the Bohemian Club. He had certain nights that he did things. I may have already mentioned this to you, have I?

Riess: No, go on.

Bowles: Then when he wasn't going out, he had several friends that he liked, and they'd come over, and they'd sit and talk and discuss finance, or whatever, or coffee, or whatever the man was interested in, or my father was interested in, and there was really no place for my mother in the conversation. They'd sit in the library and talk to one another, and leave her out of it totally.

I think my mother hated it, but she didn't know what to do about it. She probably also felt that at least he was not drinking, he was in the house, and we knew where he was, so it was

all right. I mean, a woman would never accept that today. She'd either be in the conversation or not. I don't know. It was a strange thing to me, I never could understand it.

And I thought the men that he had over were rather boring. He'd been interested in writers, and people to do with the newspapers. I think he loved publicity, because he always said to me, whenever I had my picture in the society page or anything like that, he'd say, "Oh, more! Do it whenever you can! Good publicity, that's great." So I never felt badly about having my picture in the papers.

It was sort of curious, because he didn't really enter into the social life at all, if you want to call it Social Life with a capital S. I think that was something that--. And he always said to me, "You know, you'd be much better marrying a stevedore than some of these people I see coming round to take you out." [laughter] That always made me feel better; I didn't have to aspire to anything beyond a stevedore. I knew what he meant, though, and of course I wasn't going to do it. [laughs]

Riess: What do you think he meant?

Bowles: I think he meant that they, the party types, weren't hard-working and that they weren't really sincere, and he always warned me about marrying some man that might be marrying me for my money--which I didn't have, but I guess he thought I had. He had worked very hard.

I've never gotten over that. I have a notion about people working hard and being sincere, and getting value received, and if you're paying a lot of tuition at a college, you should be getting all the value you possibly can out of it--this sort of thing. I think that was very much impressed on me, and I think he was always afraid that we'd marry someone that would be very vapid and "just a socialite," as he thought, or somebody kind of silly, that wouldn't work hard. It was really the work ethic, I think, that he was trying to instill in us.

Riess: He poured a lot of himself into you.

Bowles: Oh, no question, yes.

Riess: Even though in a way it sounds like he closeted himself off.

Bowles: He was rather remote emotionally. It was very hard for him to be very affectionate, although he was a bit. But yes, it was hard for him to be very warm and open with his children. I think he

felt that he should be an example more than a friend, so he was that way with Tom, I think, too.

But he gave a great deal of himself; you always knew what he thought politically, and in other ways. So that was good. It wasn't as though he was totally cut off. He was very responsive, I guess you'd call it. There was never a question in your mind about how he felt about anything. [laughs] I'd say that was good. I mean, lots of children grow up and they don't know what their parents feel, but we all knew exactly what everybody thought.

The Dinner Table, Sisters and School

Riess: Did you have dinners together?

Bowles: We had lots of dinners together, and lots of arguments, until finally my father would say, "Let's stop the wrangling." Because the children would get into an argument about, "I said this, and you said that." We had very lively dinners, until we got a little tired of it at times. And Tom loved to argue. It was quite fun, I would say that. Yes, we had a lot of very "family" dinners.

My two older sisters, Virginia and Jane, weren't there as often, but they were still there complaining about Tom's table manners, or whatever they worried about [laughs], and they were always trying to tell both of us what to do--older sisters, which was perfectly natural.

Riess: Did they have a different growing up experience from you, do you think?

Bowles: Very much so. The first thing my father did with them--well, I don't say first thing, but once they were through a little private school that was near our house, Miss Paul's School, and they went to Grant School for a year or two, which was a good public school out in Pacific Heights, then he must have talked to some friend of his and decided that they really should go to a very expensive boarding school. So they were sent over to Miss Ransome's School in Piedmont.

I say expensive because everything that happened in the house, I heard about what it cost--and it was a very expensive boarding school for those days. My mother always maintained that they developed a lot of ridiculous ideas, and so many false values that she could not then get them back into her way of thinking.

She used to complain to me about it. By luck the school had to close.

It was a very fine school, and the lady that ran it was just a delightful, charming woman, I remember her. But the school folded in the Depression, and so that was the end of that. And I never went to boarding school, because my mother felt that boarding school weaned her children away from her. And she thought it was very foolish. Virginia was so homesick, even though it was only in Piedmont.

My mother felt that no one else in the family was going to go to boarding school, so Tom didn't go, and neither did I. But you know, in those days there was that sort of pressure that if you wanted a girl to be a lady, she was supposed to go to boarding school. At least, that's what my father had picked up from some of his friends, I suppose. But Mother never was in favor of it.

Riess: It was thought better than going to Miss Burke's?

Bowles: More stylish. Yes, it was, because you were away, and I guess they drummed into you etiquette and all this sort of thing, and proper dress. They wore uniforms, and it was very structured.

Riess: I guess what is implied is that you would learn the things that you couldn't learn at home if you didn't know them instinctively.

Bowles: Exactly, exactly. And the unfortunate thing is that there were a lot of girls just exactly like that there. [laughs] So I think they learned nothing but a lot of bad habits, as my mother would say.

They certainly received quite a good education, because the headmistress was extremely intelligent, and they had very good teachers, and all of that. But it just wasn't my mother's idea of standards in which she believed. So anyway, I was spared that, thank goodness.

Riess: Then your sisters came back when the school closed and went to public schools?

Bowles: No, they graduated from boarding school, and Virginia went to Cal, the University of California, and then Jane went East to a school called Mount Vernon.

But they were pretty wild. It was the age, the Roaring Twenties. They weren't really that wild, but there were friends that were, and yes, they wanted to be. They wanted to wear wild clothes and spend a lot of money on clothes. They were I guess

what you'd call out of the Roaring Twenties. They wouldn't listen to Mother, and they thought they knew best.

Riess: And did they want to get away from home?

Bowles: That's right. I think they did want to get away from home, yes. They did, because it wasn't a very--it was a difficult situation, and there really wasn't much room in our house, it was quite small.

Independent Women

Riess: I was wondering, when you said that your father would have his friends come over, did your mother have a room of her own?

Bowles: Oh, yes, she did, but it was just--. I thought it was a curious situation. Yes, she could have gone to another room, but there weren't really enough bedrooms in the house, but that I don't think--well, it was always, you never had a room of your own really, which they say is so important. I don't know whether it is or not.

Riess: Lovely concept, isn't it?

Bowles: [laughs] And today, people don't have a room of their own, either.

But I think the girls were given a trip on the maiden voyage of the Santa Rosa, which was quite something, because my father thought that was very exciting, the Grace Line having that first trip through the Canal. I remember thinking how glamorous they were. They went on the trip, and on the boat there were quite a few people from San Francisco, I guess, and my sister Jane met her husband, because he had been on the ship with his mother. So anyway, that is how that happened.

Riess: And that is--?

Bowles: That was Gustav Koven. She met him, and then Virginia was married some time later [to Caspar Escher]. She lived in the East when she was first married. For many years she thought New York was the only place to live. "It was much more attractive than San Francisco," and "Why would anyone want to live in San Francisco?" sort of thing. "Much more exciting back East. New York is the only place." She's changed since.

Riess: Women had gotten suffrage in 1919. Was your mother political? Did she vote?

Bowles: Oh, yes, she was very enthused about that, very enthused. She thought it was marvelous. And as I say, she was very volatile, and not particularly organized at all. She was a rather poor housekeeper, didn't believe in much cleaning. If somebody else wasn't going to do it, she wouldn't do it.

I got a huge kick out of her: she bought the first dishwasher that anybody had ever had on Russian Hill or anyplace, and a disposal. She bought them both. And that was just unheard of! Most everyone had a maid, but she said, "Well, I don't really like a maid anyway, I can't get along with them, get rid of them!"

We sometimes had a maid, but they never stayed very long. She didn't want to do the work herself, but she wanted somebody to do it her way, and that was pretty hard to find. So help came in and out of the house like mad. [laughs] But that was all right too.

But it was interesting that she liked all those kinds of appliances, and everything that was new. I think she probably would have had a computer today. She might not have known how to run it, but she would have had one.

Riess: When did your mother die?

Bowles: In--I'm trying to think now. I was afraid you were going to--oh, I know, 1942, because it was the year I was married.

Riess: Did she have a social life among the Christian Scientists? Did the religious connection imply a social connection?

Bowles: There were quite a few of them on Russian Hill. Now, that's interesting, because as you know we grew up on Russian Hill, which was so special, just a marvelous place.

Connie at Miss Paul's School, and Miss Miller's Dancing Class

Bowles: [section added by CCB in editing] Miss Paul's School at 1032 Broadway was surrounded by a tremendous garden with a cork oak and an iron oak, as well as a large horse chestnut tree. It was built in 1875, designed by Willis Polk who had carved the redwood paneling in the dining room. Over the entryway was a quotation, "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it."

This charming building and garden was the setting for the school. Two maiden ladies, Miss Florence Paul and Miss Jane Paul, were ardent Christian Scientists and they guided our religious training. We all went there at various times, but I was there from first through sixth grade. Chess, French, and math were strongly encouraged, and many of the Russian Hill children attended. Livermores, Schillings, Hannas, to name a few. To my embarrassment, a maid would bring a hot lunch on a tray for me, when I really wanted a sandwich in a paper bag, exactly like everyone else.

From there I went to Grant School in Pacific Heights for seventh and eighth grades. Boys entered my life and I found Boy Scout pins on my desk, little notes, and lots of beaus. I was invited to go to Miss Miller's Dancing Class on Clay Street. It had been in existence for many years, a private group with several prominent women as patronesses.

Mother and I decided she should make a dress for the first afternoon party. I can see it clearly, as we picked the material together. A light beige challis with small sprigs of roses. The style was to be Kate Greenaway, and Mother had more fun running it up on her Singer sewing machine. I was absolutely thrilled, little puffed sleeves, a square neck, and a flounce at the hem line.

I went to the party, and as I came in they gave me a dance card with a little pencil on a string. Suddenly it seemed as though every boy in the room surrounded me calling for a dance. Of course I have never forgotten that first experience, and wondered if I had exaggerated my reaction. Fortunately my popularity stayed with me, and is probably one of the reasons I still enjoy parties.

Years later an old friend said, "I remember you were the most popular girl at Miss Miller's." I was modest and said, "Oh, really," though I know he was fairly close to the truth.

Best of all was the magic of Mother and I creating a dress together. [end addition]

Russian Hill Life: Feeling of Freedom, Neighbors, The Livermores

Riess: What was your Russian Hill address?

Bowles: Thirty Florence, which is the house that my sister lives in now. Henry and I bought that house from my father's estate and remodeled it, and then rented it, because Henry didn't want to live near the Eschers. Then we sold it to my sister, because she'd always wanted it, although she'd had the best house in San Francisco--but anyway, that's a whole other story. But she lives in it now.

Riess: What was that? What was the best house in San Francisco?

Bowles: It is the best house: 1032 Broadway [location of Miss Paul's School. See previous discussion]. It was an early Willis Polk house, called the Atkinson House, and it was all redwood carving that he had carved himself at the age of sixteen. It is so incredible and so beautiful, I just can't even tell you how charming it was. It's still there, but the people in it now--I don't know, they've painted it all white and done things, because my sister sold it to them. Anyway, it's a real disaster. But she always wanted this very--.

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Bowles: I am rambling on, aren't I?

Riess: No, you're making history. [laughter]

Bowles: You'll have to cut some of this.

Riess: Some of it, of course.

You were saying that on Russian Hill there were a lot of Christian Scientists.

Bowles: I don't say a lot, but quite a few. We knew them as personalities, but we never really socialized much with them. But we enjoyed them, I guess you might say that.

Riess: Maybe what my question is whether it was a community in the way that there is a San Francisco Jewish community and a Catholic community, let's say.

Bowles: I don't think Christian Scientists were a colony, but I think it just so happened that there were quite a few on Russian Hill.

It was an imaginative place, it was charming. It was very free, too. That was another thing. I think that my mother chose it for that reason. There was a bohemian place at the end of the street, and Maynard Dixon had lived there. Several other artists had lived there from time to time. That was very exciting to me, it was thrilling. So we got a lot of that free feeling, that you weren't constrained, by living in Pacific Heights, to be a certain kind of a person.

Mother never could find a house in Pacific Heights she liked, even though Dad said she could buy one. And it never bothered me at all that I lived on Russian Hill, I thought it was great. But I've talked to other people who say that they felt their childhood had been deprived because they didn't live in Pacific Heights. I've never felt that, although I live in Pacific Heights now! [laughs] It was fun, the change. I thought it would be interesting to live out there, and I have been there for thirty years now.

It is interesting, it's different. In those days, Russian Hill was a very bohemian kind of a place. But the bohemian part was what I liked. At the same time, it had people like--. Well, Russian Hill Place was across the way, and Miss King, I think her name was, Francis King Fields' aunt, Miss King, a relative of the Kings of San Francisco, whatever--she lived there.

She was a practitioner, and never married, but she was charming, and she had a Chinaman cook, and she lived in great style. In a very simple way, but she was impressive. At Christmastime she'd always send over a little pot of baked beans that her Chinaman cook had made. They came over hot, and I was so impressed! It was just so--oh, it seemed so glamorous to me. [laughs] She served hot punch and we sang Christmas carols, and her house was elaborately decorated. I was enchanted.

And Alfred Frankenstein and family lived in a brown shingle house on Vallejo.

Then also the Livermores lived right next door to us, the Livermore family, and they weren't Christian Scientists, but they were also--Mrs. [Norman] Livermore [Jr.] [Caroline Livermore] was one of the first conservationists that I ever knew. She was really a very strong woman. She was constantly having children! She had five boys. But she was for saving Angel Island, and she was for saving all these things. In those days, no woman was doing anything like that. She was remarkable.

The other thing that was fascinating to me was the intrigue of the Livermore family. Mrs. Livermore had a huge house--that

John Berggruen now lives in and owns--and behind her lived her mother-in-law, Mrs. Norman Livermore, Sr. Mrs. Norman Livermore, Sr. was the most beautiful old lady, and she wore a high pearl collar, and had also a Chinaman cook. With her lived--and listen to this carefully--lived her adopted daughter, Beth Livermore. Mrs. Livermore, Sr. had adopted a daughter, and the daughter lived with her.

The daughter was a social worker--although then I didn't know what a social worker was. But the daughter had a dog, and I was not allowed to have a dog, so I often walked this social worker's dog. Well, the point of the story is that across the street--and this is all on Russian Hill on Florence Street--lived Mrs. Livermore's real daughter, Edith, and Mrs. Livermore, Sr. didn't speak to her real daughter.

Edith, the natural daughter, was a fascinating woman who was a sculptress. I would go up to visit her all the time because she had her sculpture on an armature, and I could go up and visit with her and talk to her while she was doing it. It was so interesting, and she was always really nice to me.

I never could figure out why she [Edith] did not speak to the adopted daughter or to her mother, who lived across the street. They did not speak. It was my first introduction to that sort of discord. I liked them both. I would walk the other one's dog, and I would go to see the sculptress. They were extremely unusual people, and very definite. I thought it was so odd that they didn't get along. It seemed unbelievable to me that the mother didn't get along with her own daughter. Well, that's the way it was. I often wondered why I liked them all.

Anyway, the rest of the story is that later on Mrs. Livermore's adopted daughter, Beth [Elizabeth], befriended the man [Matthew Schmidt] that supposedly [was involved in bombing the Los Angeles Times in 1910]. He did go to jail, and she used to write to him in jail. My father was absolutely horrified, and said, "You can't even speak to those people," practically.

When he got out of jail--I thought maybe my father was making it up, ridiculous, and here this woman was an old maid, she never married, both of them were old maids, that was the other thing, and in those days you called them old maids--when he got out of jail she married him. I mean, it was just incredible! I couldn't believe that what my father was saying was true.

Riess: You were allowed to be quite independent, out in the neighborhood.

Bowles: Absolutely, I could go anywhere, visit anyone, no one said anything to me. It was just wonderful. I loved it. And there were empty lots, and you could play, and it was just free, no one every worried about you. You were perfectly safe, always, I felt. I never had any fear of anything. I just felt perfectly safe.

And there was another wonderful place that I've told people about before. It was at the top of the hill, and that place, it was so romantic that I can see it just so clearly even now. I'm trying to think of the name of--Miss Richardson. Most of these women didn't marry for some reason or other, because they were artists, I guess.

Miss Richardson was really an artist. She lived in one of the four little brown shingle houses at the top of Vallejo. I could open her gate and go down the path, and she had a little shingle studio in back. She always had a glue pot, hot glue pot, running. She made the most beautiful things that you could ever imagine out of papier-mache. She could make pumpkins full of things that you would pull out at a party on strings.

You could order anything you wanted, and you could stand there and watch her make them. It was just the most--she was so clever! I don't know why anyone doesn't do that today. I suppose it took hours. But she was really an artist, and it was fascinating. She couldn't have been nicer.

Riess: She wasn't poor, she wasn't a starving artist?

Bowles: No, but she wasn't rich, either. She lived in one room, now that I think about it. It had a little sort of a kitchen off to the side. Or maybe it was just a studio and she had the house in front. Nobody ever seemed very rich, but no one ever seemed poor, either. They just seemed perfectly happy with what they had. It didn't seem anybody was ever moaning about money, that I remember. Except at home! [laughs]

The 1929 Crash, and School Choices

Riess: This is actually the period before the crash--or not? Not quite? That was in 1929. Are we talking about ten-year-old you wandering around?

Bowles: I could have been eight or ten. The crash was '29, so it might have been just before the crash. I don't remember at that period any talk of the Depression. No, in fact the Depression [time]

that I remember was when I was at Burke School in high school, and I was about fifteen or sixteen. That I remember very clearly, because that was really sad. It was terrible.

Riess: People were having to withdraw from the school?

Bowles: Yes, and I felt very badly. My father was so good about that. I was at Burke's, and I guess I was a sophomore. I said, "But all my friends"--all the cute friends were going down to Galileo. He said, "Well, all right, the school starts a couple of weeks before Burke, so why don't you go down? Go ahead."

I thought I was so smart. Then I went down there, and I thought it was awful! The teacher was fresh, the man was kind of familiar, the math teacher, and I just wasn't used to a man in the room. I thought it was terrible, and I thought I wasn't getting any attention, I didn't like it one bit, and they treated you as though you were anybody else! [laughs] I didn't like it at all! My father was so smart, because then I said, "Oh, I'd love to go back to Burke's. I wouldn't think of staying at Galileo!"

My friends that stayed there had a very good time, and it was probably awfully good for them, and it might have been good for me, but I loved the protection of being fussed over the way you were at Burke's. Everybody took good care of you, and I liked that. I thought that was very nice. I'm such a baby, but I really liked it. [laughter] I like attention, and I like all the things that go with it.

But I do remember the Depression, and that was very sad for those girls. Some of them did try to come back for graduation, which was important to them, to say they had graduated from Burke's School.

Riess: Came back for the last year?

Bowles: Yes, scraped the money together to come back. It made a deep impression on me that my friends would have to do that. It was nice to think that I didn't, it was very nice.

But growing up on Russian Hill, I didn't get any sense of the Depression then at all, so I must have been younger. I think I was about eight. I don't know why I think that. But I guess I was.

Riess: I love the idea that you felt so free. Not a lot of, "Watch out, be careful!"

Bowles: No. I guess that's true. And in fact, in later years when I started to go out--and I went out very early, because in those days you would go out at thirteen, boys were driving, and I went out--there were so many girls that had to be home at twelve o'clock that I decided that I should start saying I had to be home at twelve o'clock. Nobody had ever told me I had to be home at twelve o'clock.

Riess: I would have assumed that your father would be particularly careful about his baby daughter.

Bowles: He was only careful after I was married, because I had to come home and live with my two children. Henry was overseas. Then he was very careful, because he was afraid I'd run off, I guess. I don't know. I must say he was pretty strict, and I was a grown woman! I shouldn't have put up with it. But he said, "You can't go out; you absolutely can not go out." [laughs]

Riess: You mean that you might meet another man?

Bowles: Yes. I think he felt that. So maybe he knew me better than I know myself! [laughing] I thought it was rather interesting. But he always gave me the feeling that I could take care of myself, that I would always be able to do that. I think that's a nice feeling.

Brother Thomas B. Crowley, and the Tugboat Business

Riess: Tell me about your brother?

Bowles: Well, Tom was a very different person, of course. I am devoted to him. He was a very private, kind of shy, bright person that liked to read a lot. He wasn't very gregarious, he didn't really like to go out much. He never cared for parties, and I think he always felt very self-conscious because he was so short. My father was short too, and Tom was a little taller than my father.

Tom just simply wasn't a very outgoing person. It wasn't part of his personality. It was hard for him. I'd try to take him to parties, and he never really enjoyed it. I think he's led a life that he has enjoyed, but I think he'd be the first person to say that he doesn't especially like people. He can take them or leave them, and he finds them kind of monotonous.

Riess: But the challenge of business?

Bowles: The challenge of business he loves, and it seems a contradiction, because you'd think that people are so much a part of business. But I guess it's possible to like business without liking people. I don't think he really needs people especially, and he's not even very interested in them. If I'll say to him, "Now, you remember so-and-so," he vaguely remembers so-and-so. He doesn't really have a feeling for people at all.

Jim Hart was the first person that told me that directly. He said, "Your brother really is not interested at all in anything I have to say, or most anyone else. He's interested in what he has to say." [laughter]

Riess: Best to understand that, I guess, in certain kinds of people. Was he interested in--well, why am I saying "was"? He's still here.

Bowles: Yes, he's seventy-eight, he's four years older than I am. In fact, he's got a new young wife--relatively new. They've been married about five years.

Riess: The arts and the things that you enjoyed, that your mother was able to bring to your life, she wasn't able to give him?

Bowles: The thing she did bring to Tom which I thought was marvelous was music. He loves music, and he loves the opera, which is kind of a contradiction. [laughs]

He's not interested in art particularly. I'd love to see him develop that, but I guess he's just never had time and never been interested. That world has been completely closed to him, as far as I can figure out.

Riess: He said in his oral history that he left Stanford in '33 because he felt he was wasting time with a bunch of "parlor-pinks trying to fill you up with a lot of propaganda during the Depression."

Bowles: That sounds right out of my father! Just right out!

Riess: In that way, he would be just like your father.

Bowles: Well, that came verse, line, and book from my father. That is exactly what my father would have said, yes, that he just felt that he shouldn't be there any longer.

Riess: That would have been your father's decision.

Bowles: That was my father's decision, oh, yes, except he probably let my brother Tom think it was his. That is exactly the kind of talk that he [Tom Crowley, Sr.] would give. He was such a strong

personality that even the words that he used were often used by all of us. It's just amazing. He had certain powerful ways of expressing himself.

My father was so conservative--I don't know whether you'd call it conservative, but he was so definite in his ideas, just like that, that it was upsetting, and yet he was able to do it in some way that was clever. Tom might say it that way and it would be very annoying to somebody, but my father could say it and get away with it. Now why that was, I don't know, but it was just a way that he had of expressing himself that seemed to do it smoothly.

Tom would invariably get someone in a big argument--which is what he liked anyway, so then he'd get in an argument and have a wonderful time! [laughs] But my father couldn't stand that wrangling, he didn't like that very much. It was not pleasant.

I don't know. Tom has a nice personality of his own, but I'm afraid that he was pretty overpowered by his father. His father combined those things. His father was marvelous with people, absolutely charming. There wasn't a woman I met, any age, that didn't think he was just divine. He had a great sense of humor, a real twinkle, he had really cute blue eyes. He was quite short--even shorter than Tom--so I don't think that the height thing should have anything to do with it, because he was just a charmer. That's all there is to it. He just exuded charm.

Riess: And power, it sounds like.

Bowles: Probably, but he wasn't a wealthy man. I mean, he really wasn't. He was successful, but he was really working for other people for a while, and then he finally had a company of his own. Tom has taken the company in a much bigger way, much bigger strides. I do give him a lot of credit for that.

Riess: Was company business discussed a lot at home?

Bowles: Yes, very much, and I felt very much part of the business, always have. But we've always been excluded totally from any participation.

Riess: You mean the women in the family?

Bowles: Yes. Virginia worked for a while as a secretary down on the waterfront, and that was kind of fun for her for about six months. But we've always been excluded. I always wanted to have something to do with the business, but they felt that there was just no place, or at least Tom has always felt there was no place for

women. He said, "We have enough trouble with women down here as it is." When I was about fifty I said, "My children are grown up, couldn't I do something?" Not at all. No place.

I've been lucky enough to fill my life with a lot of other things, and Henry had a business. He's always included me in his business, and so I don't feel too frustrated about that. I really helped Henry quite a lot with our farming. So in a small way I've fulfilled those desires that I had. I'm still a partner in Bowles Farming, and I'm very proud of it. It's been fun. I don't make big decisions, but I am part of something.

I think it's important to feel a part of a growing business, or part of something, anyway. I have been very lucky about that, and I'm pleased. I think things are going to change in the future, because I think Tom's son is quite a different person. I think he will take over the business eventually, and I think you'll see--well, I'll see quite a different personality in there.

I'm very fond of Tom--don't misunderstand me--but I think I do see him fairly clearly. He might not like what I'm saying, but I think I'm right. I could be shading this a little one way or another. Yes, he did leave Stanford, and I think it was too bad. I think it would have been better for him, for his confidence, because I think people need those kinds of things to make them feel confident--diplomas.

Riess: And the network that is created.

Bowles: Yes. I noticed in later years Virginia has enjoyed the University of California. At first she wouldn't say anything much about it, and she didn't approve of it at the time, but my father was also a strange person in that way, too. He really didn't approve of a university education very much, but he wanted her to finish college. He did think the people at the University of California were "parlor-pinks" and "lounge lizards" and so forth.

Jane, Virginia, and Constance, 1924.

Thomas Crowley, Louise Crowley, Thomas B. Crowley, and Constance Crowley, 1925.

II EDUCATION, INTRODUCTION TO BOOK COLLECTING

The Intellectual Life

Bowles: When I met Jim Hart, I said, "My God, my father would have a fit if he knew I was marrying you!" So Jim got the biggest kick out of that. Well, I'm rambling on.

But you know, it was funny, when Henry and I would sit around and talk about, "Well, who would you have married if you hadn't married me?" Henry would say, "You would have married a Jewish college professor." [laughter] I had to tell Jim that, because, well, it was so funny! And so I did. [laughs] I love the variety of life!

Riess: Why did Henry say that? Did he think that was exactly the opposite of what he was? What do you think he meant by that?

Bowles: Well, it was pretty much the opposite of what he was. I think he knew that I did enjoy Sarah Lawrence, but he knew that I'd been terribly homesick. I always said I wished I'd finished, and he said, "Oh, you would have been more impossible than you are! Had you finished, you wouldn't have married me probably. You would have run off with a Jewish college professor." I don't know, maybe I would have. I didn't think I had a chance. [laughter]

That always stuck in my mind, because I thought, "I wonder if that is really what I would have liked?" Well, I finally got one. And I love the so-called intellectual life. I really enjoy it. I think it's fascinating--for a little while.

I love the idea of variety in life; to move from one group to another I think is just fascinating. I feel as though I've had a lot of different groups in my life, and I like that. I like it a lot. Even though I do have some old friends that I cherish. But

I think that it's so exciting to move, like to the ceramic circle, to the museum, to here, to there. I like that. And I'm very restless, I get bored easily too.

Riess: When you say "so-called intellectual life," who puts the "so-called" in front of it? Would that be your father or you?

Bowles: I guess I'm saying that because, is there an intellectual life? I mean, we're all intellectuals, really. There are plenty of intellectuals around. On the other hand, after I had really been talking to Jim a long time--and he was so charming with my friends and he can be such a wonderful social person--he said, "But most of your friends really are pretty shallow. They really haven't learned very much." And I realized that he was absolutely right.

It's interesting to me. When I say "so-called"--I suppose I'm always qualifying people. I think there is an intellectual life over here [Berkeley] that is quite different. There's certainly one at Stanford, too. At any university, I think. It is a different world.

Riess: You felt that you got the real thing here.

Bowles: Yes, I think I really did. For instance, you can't go to a cocktail party in Berkeley without almost everybody at the cocktail party having written at least one book, and if they haven't written one, they've usually written about ten. Their values--again we go back to values--are completely different from San Francisco "society," if that's what you want to call it. I always qualify--

Riess: "So-calleds!"

Bowles: I know! Well, I'm afraid of being too definite.

But it's a completely different world. There's no reason why it can't mix, it's just that I guess people get trapped in a world and they don't really want to try another one. There's no reason why somebody can't be accepted in another world, but they don't want to make the effort to be there, I guess. I never know why people get so involved in a world and don't move to another area. I don't mean move physically, but try other areas.

That was my mother, I'm sure, because she was a great one for different kinds of people. She'd always say, "Don't have the same people for dinner all the time, for heaven's sakes!" Or for lunch, or whatever I was going to have. "Have different people." I always remember that when I'm going to have a party. I think, "Don't have the same people!" It is very confining. It's all

very comfortable and pleasant, but after a while it's not that much fun.

Riess: It takes a certain self-confidence, which you obviously have.

Bowles: To do that. I think that's true, yes. It doesn't bother me. I like it. I like to have, say, one couple that comes from somewhere else, or that sort of thing. I think it's important to do that.

Our Generation

Riess: In his oral history Scott Newhall, who was born in 1914, talking about his peers, who were your sisters' age, says, "The girls were bright and attractive, and they were going to end up as either dipsomaniacs or on drugs of some sort...They died young, a lot, or committed suicide. Very sad. Had to sit and wait to be asked to dance." He talks about how hellish he thought it was.[2]

Bowles: For women.

Riess: Yes.

Bowles: I think it was. And I don't know how I was so fortunate, but I think it was true. Women had to grab whatever man came along, because you might not be asked again. It was a very, very difficult situation.

When he says girls, he means the girls of his generation.

Riess: Yes, his friends' sisters, whatever--the people he met at dances and so on, his milieu.

Bowles: Right. And I think too that they had a tough time with liquor, because that had to be dealt with, and everybody--most men in those days wanted to drink as much as they possibly could until they collapsed. And they also wanted to get anything out of a woman they could, physically.

I remember my mother telling me, "If anybody tries to kiss you, just hit them. That's all you need to do." My children die

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[2] Scott Newhall, A Newspaper Editor's Voyage Across San Francisco Bay: San Francisco Chronicle, 1935-1971, and Other Adventures, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1990.

laughing! And so the first time a boy tried to kiss me, I did, I hit him just as hard as I could. [laughter] He was absolutely thunderstruck! I stopped doing that after a while: it was just a reaction, and it was silly. I think she had told the girls that that's what they should do, because how else were they going to protect themselves?

As a result, I think women just simply said, "The first man that comes along to ask me, I'll marry." It's about what they did, because men were just impossible, they were animals, as far as I can figure out. They weren't with me, but I think in that generation the ten years made that difference. I really think it did. I think we were more--I know we were more independent. We were able to say, "That's out of the question." It was much better.

There was an awful lot of drinking in our generation, I must say. I think most of the boys that I knew just drank as much as they could until they couldn't drink any more. It was just ridiculous! And hard liquor. It was terrible. It was supposed to be sort of a status symbol to see how much you could drink.

Riess: Interesting to think about that, and then that generation went off to war.

Bowles: Exactly, and they sobered up in a big hurry. They came back with all kinds of problems, physical problems, and didn't live as long, I think, some of them. It was a very sad thing, and nobody knew how bad it was. It was just terrible. But anyway.

Riess: Other interviewees have said that San Francisco was really like a small town until after the war.

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Bowles: It [doing the oral history] is really quite fun. I didn't realize it would be this interesting.

Jewish Friends, Joan Avenali

Bowles: I was going to bore you to death by telling you about the Jewish situation, which is one of the reasons that I feel so at home with Jewish people. They may not feel at home with me, but I do.

And yes, I have some very good friends that are Jewish, and at Burke School they made a great point--I didn't realize it at

the time--of having most of the prominent Jewish families in San Francisco at Burke School. Madeline Haas Russell, Marjorie Stern, all those girls I knew very well from Burke School. And I understood what a Jewish person was.

It was no surprise to me what it meant to be a Jewish person, because they were some of my favorite people. This is really far out, but one of my friends, who is still a very good friend, Joan Avenali, was Joan Ehrman. She had been adopted by a Jewish family. She was not Jewish. She was an only child. The story was that they adopted two children, but Mrs. [Emma Bissinger] Ehrman found it was too difficult to raise two children, so she sent the other one back. [laughter] I mean, can you believe it?

The Ehrmans had the most beautiful house. I just thought I had gone to heaven, because they had a butler and a cook and three in help. I was out there all the time, and they were thrilled to have me. Mrs. Ehrman and Mr. [Alfred] Ehrman absolutely adored me. They just wished that--. I was everything that Joan wasn't, but still, we were very good friends. And they were nice to Joan, but I could tell that they thought I was marvelous.

Mrs. Ehrman was a brilliant Jewish person. She even looked a little--if you can believe it--like Jim Hart. She read absolutely everything, and she was extremely political. We had all kinds of interesting conversations. Joan drove her absolutely crazy because she wouldn't wash out her undies when they went on a trip to Europe. Little things that Joan did got on her nerves just incredibly.

Riess: Did they adopt her when she was an infant?

Bowles: She was quite small, I believe, yes. Two or three. It seems so odd, but they actually asked for two children that were not Jewish. Seems strange, but they particularly wanted them, I guess, or they wouldn't have asked for them. And Joan always knew that. They told her that, so that it was no surprise to her.

But it must have been hard for her--I know it was hard for her--because Mrs. Ehrman had all these little nieces and nephews that were very Jewish, and she'd have parties for them, and they'd all come, and we who were not Jewish would find them not terribly attractive, but there they were, so you accepted them. That was it. It was a funny sort of environment for Joan to grow up in.

The point is that that was how I got to know what a Jewish family was like. I really appreciated their intelligence. They were so smart, and they ran a house so perfectly. Mrs. Ehrman said, "Never have a party unless everything is perfect." And of

course, in my house, nothing was ever perfect. [laughing] To this day, when I have a party everything has to be polished, everything has to be down to the last gasp.

Her parties were marvelous parties, and I used to say to her, "How do you have such wonderful parties, Mrs. Ehrman?" The hors d'oeuvres were good, and everything was just right. She said, "Because a lot of planning goes into it, a huge amount of planning, and don't think you can just ever have a party on the spur of the moment. You have to plan." And the food was just to die over, it was so good!

The ironic thing--and this may be off the point--but Mrs. Ehrman had the house there on Washington Street, 3730 Washington, and she owned the two lots next to it. She used them for her camellia garden. Well, she offered them to Joan, her daughter, when Joan was married, and Joan wanted to be as far away from her mother as possible. Still in the same city, but be far away. And those two lots, one was sold to the Goldmans, and they have their beautiful house on it, and the other one is now occupied by the Swigs, and they are two of the most magnificent houses in San Francisco!

I said to Joan the other day--because I would have given my right arm for one of them, view lot, everything--I said to Joan, "Does it bother you that you didn't take one?" "Not in the least. Absolutely not." [laughter] So everyone's values are different, that's all.

Friends at Burke School

Riess: Talking about how everyone got along, what about the different ethnic groups like Italians or Chinese--in fact, I would include Irish as an ethnic group. Burke School wouldn't have had any Chinese?

Bowles: Oh, heavens, no. But did they discriminate against Irish Catholics or anything like that? I didn't feel that, I never felt that. But then, I have quite a bit of confidence, and maybe it was there and I didn't see it. Well, Miss Burke was an Irish Catholic herself, so there was no way--.

The original Miss Katherine [Delmar] Burke apparently was quite a lady, and proper, but Miss Barbara Burke, who was president when I was there, head of the school, was a very down-to-earth, unstylish, salt of the earth, practical, not very

sophisticated person. There was no way that she could have acted in any way except the way she did. She was just a simple person. I think bright enough, but hardly what I would call an intellectual at all. You never heard her really discuss anything aside from the organization of the school, and who was doing what, what mother didn't get her daughter home on time. She was that kind of a person, very practical. Wonderful, very lovable, but not an intellectual at all.

I think that probably the original Miss Burke was more so. I don't think there could have been much discrimination with a person like that [Miss Barbara Burke] running the school.

Riess: Were you saying that they actually sought out the Jewish girls to be part of the school, or was it that Jewish girls were trying to get into the school because they knew that was the first step into the larger society?

Bowles: I think for one thing the Jewish girls could afford it. People weren't that flush in those days, so maybe Burke School just took what they could. But I think that they were happy to have them. I think they felt they were good citizens, and nice people, and I think that Miss Barbara Burke just didn't feel--I didn't think she discriminated herself.

Riess: It's interesting, and we talked a little bit about this last time we met, that in Elise Haas's oral history she speaks about Rhoda going to Miss Burke's, and that year she was the only Jewish girl.[3]

Bowles: Oh, really? Now, you see, I didn't realize that. Because Rhoda's a little bit older than I am, a little bit. Not much, I guess. Or maybe she's younger. [She is younger by four years at least! added in editing, CCB]

But I think you have to take this into consideration. It depends on how sensitive people are. Rhoda was a rather shy, unsure, not very attractive girl. Whether she was Jewish or not Jewish wouldn't have made a bit of difference, because she was stuck with the problem that she had, which she has overcome in these later years. But she's not an outgoing person; she's a very reserved, quiet person.

Apparently her mother was a real charmer, and quite different--Jim Hart knew her well--so this was a very hard thing

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[3]Elise Stern Haas, The Appreciation of Quality, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1979.

for Mrs. Haas to accept. She may have blamed the Jewish part on the fact that she was the only Jewish girl in the school. I don't think that's altogether true because when I was there there were--oh, heavens, there were at least ten or fifteen Jewish girls. There were all kinds of them, in all grades. So I don't think that that holds water altogether.

Riess: Who were your great pals?

Bowles: At Burke School?

Riess: Yes.

Bowles: Well, Juanita Schurman. She was Juanita Hill. Now she's Jacob Gould Schurman's wife--widow now. Kathleen Norris' granddaughter, whom I saw quite recently, Kathleen Thompson she was. A girl called Catherine Cline who was absolutely brilliant, became a doctor. And Virginia Coughlan was an old family, San Francisco. And as I say, Joan [Ehrman] Avenali [Mrs. Peter Avenali]. Betty Powell, who is married to Stanley Powell.

Then I was very friendly with the class above me and below me, and some of those are my very good friends: Kathleen "K.J." Rolph--married to John Metcalf. I still see a lot of the people in other classes. It's funny. Ann Witter Gillette. So those classes mingled a lot. At least, I did.

My daughter married the son of a girl that was in the class below me, Lucretia Hotaling [Michael]; she married her son Peter Michael. It didn't work out, but anyway they had two fine children, Amanda and Cannon, to whom I am devoted. And now they are twenty-five and twenty-one.

But it's funny, I remember the Jewish girls awfully well.

Sex

Riess: Did you have a social education class at Burke's. Sex education?

Bowles: Never. There was never anything mentioned in any way, shape, or form about sex. [laughs] Nothing, absolutely nothing, not even in physical education or anything. It was just absolutely taboo, just out. And any girl that might have been a little fast, that was also taboo. That was just terrible.

Riess: Yet that was the tenor of the times, to be a little fast, to be kind of smart in that way.

Bowles: It was totally unacceptable, just totally.

Riess: Even though it was out there all around you.

Bowles: It was out there all around you, and yet it was just absolutely forbidden in every way. In fact, as I recall, a boy was not supposed to pick you up at school. You were not supposed to let them see you; you could walk down two blocks maybe or whatever. It was all just--

Riess: A nunnery.

Bowles: It really was. But no one was really--the people I knew weren't that interested in sex; they were terrified of the whole idea. You were just to flirt, that was it. It was never to go any farther than that. That was just the whole idea.

In fact, I thought that's what you were supposed to do: just keep flirting, and that was all, it would never lead to anything else, heavens no. At least in my so-called circle, it was just out of the question that anyone would do anything--although there was one girl, now that I think about it, that was always going home to some boy's house and mending his socks. I thought there was something wrong with her. She was sort of mothering him. And of course, I'm sure something was probably going on and we were all too stupid to know it. [laughter]

I thought, how boring, to be taking care of him! I thought you were supposed to flirt with men, not take care of them. So anyway, but that was as far as--and I think that girl finally did get herself into a bit of trouble. But she was only being motherly, you see. There was a difference. She was just being motherly. And that was all right, I guess. Although she got herself in a bit of a jam, I think.

You were supposed to be on a higher plane, a much higher plane. [laughter] And I think we were; I think we really were. In a way, it was sort of good because you were liked just for who you were. Not for any favors you were doing for a boy or for a man or whatever; you were just liked. If they liked you, that was fine; if they didn't, well, that was your tough luck. And I don't think that sleeping with anyone would have been any help to be popular. In fact, I think it would have made somebody less popular.

Smart Girls and the Right School

Riess: Were smart girls liked? Was it all right to be very, very smart, or was there a kind of stigma?

Bowles: Smart girls were very well liked. I thought so, yes, I did. There weren't that many smart ones. [laughs] No, but also, smart girls pretended they weren't smart.

Riess: Even among girls? Usually the thing that you try to do is mask your smartness around the boys.

Bowles: Well, it's pretty hard to mask it with the girls, because you'd be right there in class with them, and you knew who was smart and who wasn't. So that was hard to mask. But with the boys, yes, I think that you always played it down a little. Although, I must say--not that I considered myself smart, but I was smart in certain areas, and I never felt particularly that I was so smart that I had to play it down. I never did. I think being smart is wonderful.

Riess: Your friends, what did they do? You said one was a doctor--did they go off to East Coast schools? Was that the thing you all hoped to do?

Bowles: No, most of them went to Stanford. I would say the majority of the class went to Stanford.

I had a very good friend, Geraldine Kendrick, who really became quite a personality in San Francisco. She was such a stable, marvelous person, and she was probably one of the poorest students I've ever known. She said, "I went to Stanford because my father was a trustee." In those days, you got into Stanford if your father was a trustee, or anybody important. She was the most marvelous person, died of cancer about five years ago now. But stable, organized, responsible--just a wonderful person. She married Austin Morris, and then George Lindsay.

Riess: But the girls mostly wanted to go to Stanford?

Bowles: Yes, to Stanford.

Riess: Not Mills?

Bowles: No, nobody went to Mills.

Riess: What was it about Mills?

Bowles: The same thing that there is about Mills today, I guess. It was so available, and they never thought the girls were very attractive. The boys didn't think they were attractive. Don't ask me why. I'm sure there were some nice ones. One from my class, Virginia Coughlan, went to Mills. But they [Mills girls] were never very attractive girls. How you get a reputation like that, I don't know. To say a whole college isn't attractive? It's ridiculous.

But they [Mills] always were considered sort of second-rate, and that's so terrible. My own granddaughter graduated from Mills, and she just loved the place. I think it's a fascinating college. I've heard of Eastern girls coming all the way out to go to Mills because they thought it was such a fine education, and here we have always turned our nose up at Mills College.

You know how people attach names to things, and they never get over it. I don't know what the reason for it is. Jim [Hart] was very enthused about Mills, he was a trustee there for twenty years. I thought it was a great college myself, but I think it has a long way to go. In the years to come it may change, and women will think how marvelous it is to have a girl's college.

Amanda, my granddaughter, was very active when they had the big strike. She wanted to keep women there, she didn't want men in at all.

That was the other thing: for so many years there were no men there. Girls, after being at a girl's school, they want to go someplace where there are boys. They just didn't want to go to Mills. They felt very strongly about that, after being at Burke's, because you did do a certain amount of--oh, not sneaking around, but you never really got to know boys very well, because you only saw them on the weekends or at parties.

The Question of Jobs

Bowles: And, after all, in our day it was considered rather a disgrace for a woman to work. If you had to work at Magnin's as a saleslady, or something like that, my mother would say, "Oh, that poor thing. She has to work." It was a reflection on your husband, that he couldn't support you. And women were not trained to go out and get a job.

Maybe I told you, the one time that I was offered a job, with a decorator, my father said, "He's only using you for the friends

that you know. You simply cannot take that job." And he wasn't unkind about it, but I thought, well, he's probably right, so I didn't take the job. Probably just as well. As a result, I never have had a job. I hope I never have to have one now! [laughs]

Riess: What was the intention in going to Stanford?

Bowles: That you would be a well-educated person, and that you might be helpful to your husband in some way.

Riess: But not to get a job.

Bowles: No. It was not.

Riess: It's interesting, though, because it was the beginning of wartime, and women in wartime were taking jobs, it was the beginning of women getting a chance to join the world. But there wasn't a sense of that?

Bowles: Not at all. If you could do a good job as a volunteer, that was what you were meant to do. To be a really important volunteer, to be head of the Junior League, to run something like the Red Cross, or be a perfect volunteer, that was the more appropriate thing for a woman to be doing. Especially if she was married to a man who was fairly successful. You were supposed to marry a successful man of course! [laughs] I mean, that's just the name of the game.

You were raised to marry someone that would take care of you in the style to which you hoped to be accustomed. You really were. And so, that was a very difficult thing for some people, because they found out after they got married that that wasn't going to be the case. That was very hard.

Riess: So that's why it was really so tragic, quote unquote, about your friends who had to go to Galileo, because they had been downgraded in terms of potential husbands?

Bowles: Absolutely, they were not very good marriage material because they had gone to Galileo. That's a terrible thing for me to say, but you know, men are just as crass as women are about that sort of thing, even in those days, because their mothers say, "Oh, where did she go to school?" It just wasn't in the book.

Riess: Interesting. People would never quite suspect all of this of California, because California has been a very democratic edge of America. You're describing a culture that's very constrained by the old rules.

Bowles: [laughing] Well, as you say, it's a small town. You know, it is a big small town. I think that's the way it is. I hope I'm not giving you the wrong picture, but I'm giving you the picture that I saw.

College Choice, A Year at Sarah Lawrence

Riess: What about going to Berkeley rather than Stanford?

Bowles: Well, you only went to Berkeley if you really couldn't afford to go to Stanford, or Vassar.

Actually, Vassar was the ultimate. If you went to Vassar, that was really pretty exciting. No one in my class went to Vassar, but several girls, like Ann Witter Gillette, went to Vassar.

I knew I didn't want to go to Stanford, because I have always fancied myself as someone rather special. [laughs] And I think I was right, only because I'm as independent as I am. I knew that I didn't want to be in a mold; I didn't want to be the kind of person that went to join a sorority and all that sort of thing--I didn't want to do any of that. I knew that.

That's why I went to Sarah Lawrence. I wanted to be different. I knew I was different, and I wanted to keep it that way. Peculiar.

Riess: What about Vassar?

Bowles: My daughter, I really wanted her to go to Vassar, because I said all the people that I know that I think are well-rounded, that have a really good education, have gone to Vassar and gone through the four years. And she was a very good student, so there was no problem, she went to Vassar and did love it. I mean, I didn't insist on her going to Vassar, but I hoped that she would. It was a wonderful experience for her. She's a fascinating girl, really.

Riess: What about Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke?

Bowles: They never entered my picture.

Riess: And they didn't enter the picture back here either?

Bowles: No. I took my daughter Bea [Beatrice] East and we looked at the various colleges, and you can tell from the minute you step on the

campus whether you like it. It's so odd. We didn't like Smith, and we went to several.

Riess: No, I mean for you.

Bowles: Oh, for me. Why didn't I think of other colleges?

Riess: Yes. How were the Eastern colleges presented? Did you get a lot of guidance from the people at Burke's?

Bowles: None at all, no. No one told you anything. You do whatever you want. It was just not anything that anybody worried about. And they never had that counseling or anything like that. I never had anyone sit down and say to me, "I think this is what you could do or not do." I had no feeling of that.

Riess: Did your friends who went East thrive at those Eastern colleges? Do you feel that you did?

Bowles: Oh, I had a terrible time. I had a wonderful time, but I was so homesick, I just suffered. So that's why I didn't go back. But I thought it was the most stimulating, fascinating place. I was there at just the peak of everything, with all the best teachers.

Looking back, it couldn't have been a better time to be there. I can't tell you all the really outstanding people that were there. Rene d'Harnoncourt, Joe Campbell--every one of them, Horace Gregory--it was like a field day of people. I rushed from one thing to the other, loving every minute of it. It was fascinating.

Riess: Were you the one California girl there?

Bowles: No, I had gone back with my friend, Joan Avenali. But Joan had a roommate who was a New York debutante, and this girl was a complete neurotic, but whatever, she swept Joan away, and Joan was off at parties every weekend with this New York debutante. And I was sort of left at school. It wasn't all that bad, but I had been used to a lot of attention, and I really didn't like not having it, not being the queen of everything, or thinking I was.

You know, this is all up here, but I just was desperately lonely, and I couldn't get over it. I just couldn't get over the surroundings, the cold, the buildings, the room, everything, it just seemed strange to me. But I loved the excitement of the teachers and all the different things that were happening.

Riess: Well, you're talking about what I'm asking about, and that is, are Eastern girls brought up in such a very different way that perhaps

your enthusiasm and your sheer liveliness was more than they had ever seen?

Bowles: That could be. [laughs] The girls from Honolulu, I felt warmly about them. They were very friendly, because they were also homesick, and they were much nicer to me. And then there were a few girls from the South, New Orleans and places like that, that were very outgoing and very pleasant. But they were few and far between. There weren't that many of them.

Dating

Bowles: Finally I met up with a girl who lived in New York City, and she was my roommate. And that was very interesting, because her mother was head of some big cotillion in New York or something. They thought that I was right out of the bush! They took me to some place, and I bought--I can see the dress now--they bought me an evening dress, and it was wine velvet with chiffon, $39.95. I wasn't fat, I guess, but it was the most unbecoming dress I have ever had. I went to some party. I still didn't know anyone. What was I doing at this party? I didn't know any of the boys or anything.

They tried very hard with me, but I was not a great success. Now that I think about it--you are going to be shocked at this--now that I think about it, I was not I think very sexy, and I think that sex was there more than I realized. I was just a babe in the woods. I've told you that I had been told that you were supposed to hit boys if they tried to kiss you! [laughing] I was just out of it! I didn't realize that I might have been a little more giving or something.

Riess: You had learned how to flirt?

Bowles: I had learned how to flirt, but I didn't know what else to do. [laughs] I didn't know there was something else to do, because I never gave myself a chance to find out, actually. I was terrified of what might happen, because I didn't know what happened. Nobody told me. I had no idea. So it was just--.

I'm not trying to excuse myself for not being popular at a New York party, but the thing that makes me realize this is that years later there were two boys that came out from New York, and a friend who asked me to go on a blind date. We went up to the Mark Hopkins Hotel. She [Midi Warren Fagan] was a most beautiful girl and she dressed divinely--and this was way before, it was when I

was college age--she was so pretty, and I felt sort of all thumbs, and I felt very clumsy.

Well, she ordered a glass of sherry. I'd never been out with anyone that had ordered a glass of sherry. A woman ordered a glass of sherry! I was just absolutely aghast. I guess I ordered a Coca-Cola, or whatever I ordered. Then we stood up to dance. The boy that was my blind date, he was so nice to me, he said, "You know, you really don't have to worry about not being an Easterner"--they came from some Eastern college.

I was hysterical. They were so sophisticated, I thought. He said, "You know, you really don't need to worry about that, you're perfectly nice the way you are," or whatever he said. I thought, well, isn't that nice! It was thoughtful of him to say that. There was a sophistication there that I really was not up to yet. I simply wasn't. I was just all over the lot--and that's an expression of my father's. Well, I learned a little later.

Studies ##

Riess: You were at Sarah Lawrence for a year. What classes did you take? You took a class with Joseph Campbell?

Bowles: And Genevieve Taggard. I actually didn't get in Joe Campbell's class. He was so popular, because he was so good-looking.

Riess: He was teaching a class in mythology?

Bowles: Yes. I'm not sure it was called mythology.

He smoked a pipe, and he was about thirty, and wore an old tweed coat, and the girls just fought to get into his class. I thought, well, that's one that I can't win, so I'm not going to that class, because it was just too competitive. But he was there, and I knew him, and he was charming.

I knew his wife, Jean Erdman. I also took a Martha Graham dance class, and Jean Erdman was in my class. She was marvelous. And when they fell in love--this really all happened while I was there--it was quite remarkable.

Riess: Where did you take Martha Graham dancing?

Bowles: They had a big auditorium at the college, and she came up to the college. That was what was so wonderful about it: these teachers came up to the college, and that was quite exciting. You didn't have to go anywhere; they just came.

So yes, I did that, and then as I say Rene d'Harnoncourt was there. I believe he was the sculpture teacher. Sally [Lilienthal] I think took from him. And I took pottery. It was so overwhelming to me, all these things. I started a psychology class, I think I took that for a while. They would let you just move from anything that you wanted, so that was very interesting, to be able to move.

Riess: You mean, you didn't have majors?

Bowles: No, you didn't have to stay with anything. If you decided you wanted to do something else, you could do it. [laughs] It sounds ridiculous, but it was great fun.

Genevieve Taggard I think was probably the biggest influence in my life. She was a fascinating woman, and she was an authority on Emily Dickinson, and I'd always been very good at English at Burke's, and in fact the English teacher had been my favorite teacher.

Riess: Was that Lelah Craig Brown?

Bowles: Yes! How did you know that?

Riess: From Polly Ghirardelli's oral history.[4]

Bowles: I see. Yes, Lelah Craig Brown was a fabulous woman, really good.

Riess: What kind of writers did she introduce you to?

Bowles: It was pretty much Will Shakespeare, very thoroughly through Shakespeare, and poetry, and Tennyson. We'd memorize miles of poetry. I was always good at that, oddly enough. But I don't remember her doing anything very modern.

Riess: And there was the writing group at Burke's, the Penguins.

Bowles: Yes, I was in that. I fancied myself always as an intellectual. Now, that sounds silly to you, but I really did, because I

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[4]Polly Ghirardelli Lawrence, The Ghirardelli Family and Chocolate Company of San Francisco, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1985.

thought, being in the Penguins! And I guess it was something that --talk about myself!--but it was something that I always felt that I was pretty good at. It's so funny. Anyway!

Riess: In the case of Genevieve Taggard's class, you didn't drop out?

Bowles: No, and I talked to her quite a lot. We got to be quite good friends. I liked her very much.

Riess: Were you writing in Genevieve Taggard's class, or was it more a survey?

Bowles: It was more of a survey, yes. We weren't writing poetry, but I think we wrote a little. She was just a charming woman, very interesting, and I gather she taught here at Berkeley, too, at one time.

Riess: Yes, and she graduated from Berkeley [in 1919].

Bowles: I didn't know that.

Riess: I was looking her up in Jim Hart's Companion to California this morning.

Bowles: Yes. Well, I talked to Jim about her, but we never had time, or somehow we never got back to it.

She also reminded me--I'm so funny about people--she reminded me of my mother, she looked a lot like her. I found that interesting. And it was so strange, the connection between Mrs. Ehrman looking like Jim--how could that be! But there were certain things--the way Jim wore sort of a tight pair of glasses, and his eyes were close together, and Mrs. Ehrman was always peering at a book. [laughs] Genevieve Taggard had a wonderful broad face, and she had high cheekbones, and she looked a lot like my mother, I thought.

Riess: And do you look like your mother?

Bowles: People say I do, but I don't think I do. I don't know who I look like, but maybe a little I look like her.

Train Travel

Riess: Did you come home at Christmas that first year?

Bowles: I wanted to come home at Christmas in the worst way, and my father said it was too expensive. I'm trying to remember if I stayed--see, I had a sister who was married by then and lived in New Jersey.

I think I finally finagled my father into letting me go home, and we came home by train, and that was wonderful fun. On the train were all the boys, the few boys that had gone East to school. And they thought I was great, so that was <u>really</u> fun!

That was really the high point of my career, going back and forth on the train, because we had such a good time. We'd send crazy telegrams and sit in the compartment. It was just really fun, I loved that. And going to the dining car for dinner, and having a really fancy dinner, and yet feeling alone.

You were away and alone, but you were protected--it was great. It was just a wonderful way to travel, I thought. And I usually managed to have a birthday party on the train, because I'm born on January 3rd, so everybody made a big fuss over me. And I guess I'm like everyone else, we like being made fusses over.

Riess: But you just did the freshman year.

Bowles: I just did the freshman year, yes.

<u>Europe, 1937, the Morgan Gunsts, and Book Binding</u>

Bowles: And then my sister had been having all kinds of problems with beaus, and my father wanted her to get married, and she didn't want to get married because she never found anybody that would be quite right, he thought--and I think mostly she thought--it would be nice if we would go to Europe for a year. We'd be doing a lot of studying and so forth. Well, it [the idea that we would be studying] was a mistake on my part.

I always felt older than my sister, because although she was nine years older she was a rather unstable character, and she had a tendency to drink. I had a horror of that, just an absolute horror of it. She'd have a glass of wine and be very silly, and I just thought that was shocking. So I felt as though I was sort of taking care of <u>her</u>. We had a good time, but I don't think I learned very much, except to buy clothes.

Riess: What year was that?

Bowles: That was a very interesting time to be there: it was '37 and '38, and it was when Hitler walked into Austria. We were there for the Nazis, and saw them all, and that was pretty exciting.

We were also in Paris when Marjorie Gunst [Stern] and Madeline Haas [Russell] were there, and Mr. Gunst, Morgan Gunst, was buying French modern bindings. His wife [Arline]--this was a fascinating picture to me--his wife was the most beautiful woman you could ever imagine, and they stayed at the Meurice Hotel, and she sat on a chaise lounge with these beautiful clothes, and a hat on usually, just sitting there all day long, and he was out buying up modern French bindings.

They [the books] were so beautiful. He'd show them to us, and I just fell in love with them. I thought, imagine having an extra ten dollars that you could buy a book like that! And he was buying them for--well, maybe it was twenty, but it couldn't have been any more than that. And each one was more beautiful than the last. We just fell in love with them.

His collection then went to Stanford, you know, it was a famous collection. But he was collecting books while she was buying all those clothes. Of course Marjorie Stern, young Marjorie Gunst, has been so good at building the San Francisco Library and having so much to do with that.

I think that introduced me to a love of books, which I already had, but when I saw those bindings I just thought they were fantastic. And when I first met Jim Hart I said to him something about bindings, and he said [haughty voice], "A person that's interested in books is not interested in bindings." I said, "Well, that's what's wrong with The Bancroft Library, it needs a few modern bindings! They're so wonderful."

The intellectual--there are certain things that they don't think they want to include, but that's so silly, because if you love something, of course you want a beautiful cover for it. Why wouldn't you? They had a feeling that they were above all that, but I think they're over it now.

I gave Jim a book for the Bancroft done by Philip Smith, who is England's most famous binder. He's just an outstanding binder. You have it here [in The Bancroft Library], and it [the binding] is so appropriate for the book. It's just marvelous. The Waste Land. I didn't want to part with it.

Oh, that's what I studied with Genevieve Taggard, T.S. Eliot. We went into that in depth. And it was wonderful fun, I just loved it. I came home, and I had the record of The Waste Land,

the T.S. Eliot recording, and I played it for my mother. She, I think, was afraid I'd gone mad! I don't know what ever happened to that record. But I was really full of that and thought it was marvelous, and it was.

We went over every single word in that poem, just went over it and over it. So that was a great experience. The Emily Dickinson thing she kind of put behind, because she really wanted to work on The Waste Land. I think that was it, yes. So that was what I really got out of Sarah Lawrence. I think that was just outstanding, very, very good. I was thrilled about that.

Riess: When you went to Europe with your sister had you been intending to look up the Gunsts?

Bowles: No, we didn't realize they were in Paris.

See, there's an example. I had known Marjorie at Burke's, and Madeline, they'd always been best friends. I guess they were in the same class, the class ahead of me. So it made it such fun, because I have never felt that just because she wasn't in my class she wasn't my friend. It was very easy. I guess I'd gone out with her brother, Marjorie's brother, a little, too. Yes, I had, I'd known him. Anyway.

Riess: You were free to go to Europe. Your father didn't have any trouble with the idea of you and your sister alone.

Bowles: Not in the least, not in the least.

Riess: Presumably, she was chaperoning you.

Bowles: She was supposed to be chaperoning me, yes. [laughs]

Riess: This is Virginia we're talking about?

Bowles: This is Virginia, yes.

Riess: What do you think were the most important influences from that trip? The binding?

Bowles: That was very interesting, and of course the Hitler thing was incredible, to actually see those people and see that they had signs on the stores in Vienna saying, in German, "This is a Jewish store," on the outside of the glass window, and they'd have to close up shop. I mean, it was very frightening. And, of course, the Nazis, when they came into a restaurant everybody in the restaurant would have to stand up and say, "Heil Hitler."

Riess: Do you remember talking about it in Paris?

Bowles: No. Isn't that funny? I don't. Because we never--with my Jewish friends, we never discussed the fact they were Jewish. It never came up. Any more than maybe if you had a Black friend you'd discuss the fact that he was Black. I've never had a Black friend, but I never felt--.

Riess: Well, true, and they may have felt safe, and very different.

Bowles: I think they felt pretty safe. We thought they were safe. But actually, they weren't at all, when you think about it. Because Vienna is just a jump away. They were not safe at all. But everyone in the world thought they were.

They mostly stayed in Paris, though Marjorie went down to the Riviera a bit. I don't think they had--I didn't know if they had any fear, I didn't ever hear them talk about it. Mr. Gunst was adorable, just very down-to-earth and charming, a delightful man. And he was a real collector.

Riess: Did he explain to you what was good about something and what was not, take you in some way under his wing?

Bowles: Yes, he really did.

I went down a long time ago to Stanford and looked at the collection. I can't remember if this was before I married Jim. Somehow I wanted to go down and see it. And you have to put on white gloves, and they show the pieces to you, and it brought it all back. Yes. Mr. Gunst, he was a very giving person, and he took the time to tell us.

Belle Young, Florence Walter

Bowles: When we came home, Virginia and I, we called Belle McMurtry Young, who was the teacher for Mrs. [John I.] Walter [Florence Walter]. And we also went to see Mrs. Walter. That was an experience in itself. She had all this beautiful French Provincial furniture that she had had made for bookbinding, a whole suite of furniture made that went with the bookbinding. And she had a studio.

We soon realized that we were in something a little over our heads, it was so expensive and so overwhelming. Belle McMurtry Young, we took a couple of lessons from her. You have to cut off the bindings--and we got some very good copies, I can't remember

now what they were, of some books, and when we realized the expense of binding a book, we decided that that was something that wasn't up--. It's very expensive when you get into it, it is a luxury thing.

If you're not going to do it right, you'd better not get into it. It's very exacting. And not only that, you have to have all the equipment, you really do. Mrs. Walter gave all that to Mills College, I understand. It's out there now.

Riess: Rather than Stanford?

Bowles: I believe so. Morgan Gunst gave his books to Stanford.

The curious thing about Mrs. Walter, all three of the girls--and one of them is quite an artist [Nell Sinton]--none of them wanted any of her books, none of her three daughters. I think each maybe only have one of her books. And she had done all kinds of beautiful books. It's amazing about children. I guess they often just reject what the parent represents.

They didn't even want them, and they have never felt connected to them at all. You know how if you had a little money you'd feel as though you wanted to give it to a good cause--they just, none of that.

Riess: You mean, they haven't enriched that collection.

Bowles: Not at all, and they're not interested. I think that's what happens--. I'm no psychiatrist, but maybe that's what happens when a parent is too perfect. Because Mrs. Walter apparently insisted they come for dinner every Sunday night, and she had all the help and all that. And when someone is too demanding, it just turns people against them, I guess, totally. I don't know what it is. Maybe being too perfect. I don't know. I can't pretend to get into it.

Riess: You said "we" studied with Belle Young. Virginia was still living here?

Bowles: Yes, and she was still not married, and as I say, my father was very concerned about this. She was too, because she was twenty-nine and not married--I mean, that's pretty old! [laughs] So anyway, that's another story, too.

My sister Jane was having a lovely time. She married a man that was quite well-to-do--and that went through ups and downs, and that's been an interesting story. Anyway, Virginia went East to visit Jane, and to take care of her children while Jane was

away, and she met a friend of Jane's, Caspar Escher, and married him. So that took care of that, so everybody was happy. Because Jane had said, "If you're not going to get married pretty soon, I don't know what we're going to do with you!" Everybody said that to poor Virginia.

Riess: Where did Mrs. Walter live then?

Bowles: She lived in a big old Victorian that I think was on the corner of Steiner and Washington. It's been taken down. I think there's an apartment there now. I remember opening the door--I can see her now, a little woman, very precise, with her hair all done perfectly. We were just terrified.

I think the reason we made an appointment was that Morgan Gunst had told us to. Because we were so enthused over his bindings, he said, "When you go back to San Francisco--" and he told us about Belle McMurtry Young. And she might have said to us, "Why don't you go see Mrs. Walter, and she'll explain to you how complicated it is." [laughing] I could see thousands of dollars later--[laughs]

Ironically--oh, life is so ironic! When I was married to Henry, what happened? He had inherited a lot of beautiful Audubon books that were beautifully bound, and all this sort of thing. Then he went to the war, and the books came to 30 Florence Street, to our house, with a bookcase. They went in a bare room that we had downstairs on the main floor, a main floor room, but it was always very bare.

My father and Tom were unmerciful. They kidded me about these books that were finely bound that had nothing inside of them. And, "What is a binding with nothing inside of it?" I had to suffer through that terrible torment, and trying to defend myself that there were things inside the book. "But what did they mean, just fancy bindings? They didn't mean a thing!" [laughter] But they added a lot to the room, and when I finally took them out of there, and I have them [now] in my house in San Francisco, they look wonderful!

I have some beautiful books, I really do, and Henry and I of course then collected beautiful press books. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I have about six thousand books.

Riess: Well, we must stop now. But next time could you tell Henry's story? [Henry Miller Bowles died in November, 1981.]

Bowles: I'd love to.

III MR. AND MRS. HENRY MILLER BOWLES

[Interview 2: May 20, 1992] ##

First Impressions of Henry Bowles

Riess: How did you meet Henry Miller Bowles?

Bowles: How did I meet Henry Miller Bowles? I met Henry Miller Bowles at a cocktail party in Hillsborough. The young man I was with was a friend of his, and Henry Miller Bowles came up and said hello to this young man and ignored me totally. It made me absolutely furious. [laughter] Of course I was intrigued by anyone ignoring me. I was not used to being ignored. So it was rather interesting.

The next time we went out sailing--I went out sailing with my brother. Tom had a boat on the San Francisco Bay, a typical Bird boat which was designed and built for San Francisco Bay weather. But anyway, we needed another man. I had already a young man, but I needed a man for my friend, Joan Ehrman [Avenali]. So I said, "Why don't we invite Henry Bowles?" We did invite Henry Bowles. My brother and I picked him up. He was very jolly and had a case of beer with him. My brother did not drink, and disapproved of anyone who did. So Henry was extremely unpopular the whole day, because he sat and drank his case of beer.

Riess: And your brother let him know?

Bowles: My brother let him know in no uncertain terms that no one brought beer on his boat. Poor Henry. [laughs] Anyway. And so, then I guess after that he asked me out instead of asking Joan, which of course had been my idea all along!

Riess: Was he quite attractive?

Bowles: He was very shy, painfully shy. But, I thought, very attractive, yes. We had read a lot of books that we liked, and that sort of brought us together, I think, the books that we had read. And our backgrounds were very similar, so that made it fun. It was interesting. I guess I told you that we found out when we went to Europe for the first time that we'd been delivered by the same doctor, and also we had lived just a block away from one another, because they had lived on Russian Hill Place and I had lived on Florence Street, which is up on Russian Hill.

The Bowles Family

Riess: Whose house was the Bowles estate in Claremont Pines?

Bowles: That was his grandmother's house, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Ernest Bowles. I never knew his grandmother, but she apparently was a very fascinating woman. Philip Ernest Bowles, Mr. Bowles, had graduated from Cal. The family came down from a place called Arcata up in Humboldt County. He had been enormously successful. After he graduated from Cal he started a bank and he had done very, very well. Mrs. Bowles had been a McNear. So these were two families that were--. They built that beautiful place in the pines and lived in great style.

She intrigued me, although I never met her. I may have told you this, that I found out, when I looked into it, she used to invite students up from Berkeley to have dinner. She was just a person that was very interested in students. I think the fact that she left that hall [Bowles Hall, UC Berkeley dormitory] in memory of her husband was marvelous, and I hope someday they fix it up, because now it's in bad shape. It was a wonderful thing to do.

They had three boys and a girl, the Bowleses: Amy Bowles, who married Hiram Johnson's son and died very young; and then they had Henry's father, George McNear Bowles; and they had another son, Philip; and another son, Bob. So they had three boys and a girl.

Henry's father married Beatrice Nickel, who had been the daughter of Henry Miller's only daughter. So that was quite a marriage. But unfortunately, both the families lost absolutely <u>everything</u> during the Depression; Miller and Lux had to sell most of its farm land. The Bowleses always amused me, because you know how families are, the Bowleses always thought they were a lot more stylish [than the Millers], and they actually were, because Mr. Bowles had gone to college, or he had gone to Cal.

The Millers were just sort of--I guess you'd call them newcomers, so to speak, because they had made their money fairly recently. Why they thought they were better, I don't know, but you know how people are. They actually did, they just felt they were much more stylish. In fact the Bowleses taste was much better, I must say. Over the years, I've thought so too. So they weren't very happy with the marriage, and the marriage was not very successful, unfortunately.

Riess: You hadn't heard of them, or known of them when you were growing up on Russian Hill?

Bowles: No. Henry's mother and father moved from Russian Hill Place when he was three or four.

Riess: Where did he go to school?

Bowles: Henry went to the Potter School, which then became the Damon School, and then during the Depression, at the same time that many of my friends had left Burke's, Henry went to Galileo, which was probably a very good thing for him, because he was extremely bright and he could have been terribly spoiled--which he kind of was. But going to public school was a come-down for him, and it was probably a good thing.

A Wonderful Life: The First Ten Years

Bowles: From there he went to Colorado School of Mines, and that was interesting, because he thought he might like to be an engineer. He took an engineering degree, which was a great discipline for him. If he had he gone to someplace like Yale, as his father had, and just taken a general course, it probably wouldn't have been nearly as useful. And it turned out that he loved engineering, and he was very interested in it. The boys at Colorado School of Mines were all--nothing stylish about them, they were all just sort of country bumpkins, and that was good.

Henry was not a snob, I'm not trying to make him sound as though he was, but he could have easily fallen into that sort of social milieu, just knowing the right people. He never really felt that way. He liked his friends very much that he knew at college, and he had a lot of enthusiasm for it. And, of course, he loved Golden, Colorado, and the skiing was excellent, and the hunting and fishing.

Riess: Do you think he had any idea of where he was going to end up?

Bowles: Yes. One of the McNears had the Idaho-Maryland Mine, and Henry had worked up there in Grass Valley for a summer. I think he actually thought he might be a mining engineer. In fact, he did think that. But where he was going to end up, he didn't know, because it depends on what mine you get to work for, and of course, then there were a lot of mines that were closed down. It was not an easy field to get in. Actually, he never really had a job except the summer job. He volunteered for the war, for the army.

When he got out of the army, then he had to look around for a job, because we were already married, and what was he going to do? And that was where his engineering came in, it was very helpful, because he did get a job over at Richmond for the Standard Oil refinery. Because of the engineering, they were happy to take him in the refining part, which he absolutely adored. He really found what he loved over there, and worked long hours with true satisfaction.

Then we had a wonderful kind of ten years of a nice house, and being away from San Francisco, and living that life, very near the refinery, and knowing a lot of people there.

Riess: Where were you living?

Bowles: We found a [Walter] Ratcliff-designed house in north Berkeley, 1438 Hawthorne Terrace, for I think what was a ridiculous amount: $45,000 I think it was. We just thought it was the most marvelous house, which it was, and right next door to Sylvia and Don McLaughlin. It was just out of this world, beautifully built and everything.

Then we made a lot of friends that were a combination of Berkeley--the University of California at Berkeley--and Standard Oil. It was a wonderful life for me, because I would probably have just preferred to stay in San Francisco, but it broadened my horizons tremendously. I found that people wouldn't come over to Berkeley because it was too far to go for dinner, so I made my own friends, and we made our own friends, and it was really delightful. We had I think it was about ten of the happiest years I could imagine.

Riess: That's so interesting. I was going to ask whether you had any inclination, when you married, to break away from the Bay Area, to just be somewhere else.

Bowles: I had very little inclination, but I had to go where he got a job. And it was a requirement of Standard Oil to live only twenty minutes away from the refinery.

Henry was devoted to San Francisco. His mother lived there, and all his friends, so yes, he didn't want to be away.

Riess: Maybe more the next generation liked the idea of being somewhere else, and being independent.

Bowles: I have never felt that way. [laughter] Never! I like all the attention I can get. I've never felt rebellious at all. It's so odd--. I suppose maybe my parents thought I was, but I've never felt I was. I've always thought I'd been really a conformist, completely.

Riess: And you're saying that even coming across the bay was a fairly significant move.

Bowles: It was, an absolutely huge jump. In fact, my father had a fit, because he thought it was much too far away.

The Miller and Lux Litigation, 1953-1963

Riess: Somehow I thought Henry was a lawyer.

Bowles: Well, what happened was--that was interesting, because our ten years were so blissful, it was marvelous. I remember we sat around one night and said, "We have $500 in the bank and we've never been happier."

And then, out of the blue, Henry's mother--this is a long story--but anyway, it was involved with the Miller and Lux case, and Henry's mother's income was being cut because one of his cousins had hired a lawyer and they were suing.

Riess: I read about that case from the point of view of John Bates, a lawyer at Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro.[3] I can tell you what I have here, and if you want to interpret it that would be fine.

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: The case was Miller and Lux vs. Anderson (1963). The principal client was George Nickel. It reads, "George Nickel really should take key responsibility for starting the litigation...The case

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[3]John B. Bates, Litigation and Law Firm Management at Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro: 1947-1987, The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1988.

created a lot of concerns and animosities and high emotional feelings throughout the San Francisco financial community, and indeed through California."

The story was that oil was discovered on the ranches in the 1930s after a protective committee, which involved Allen Chickering and so on, had put the real estate holdings up for sale. Information was being bandied about among insiders, Leroy Nickel in particular. And there is a parenthetical remark that Dean Witter became very wealthy out of all of this because he had various holdings in everything.

Bowles: Yes. That's not very accurate, but anyway.

Riess: Summing up Bates: Leroy Nickel was involved in kickbacks, "...But it wasn't until the '50s that George Nickel came across some evidence that made him believe that this had been going on during the liquidation period, and that there had been illegal deals being made." George Nickel and the protective committee got a lawyer and sued Standard Oil. It was complicated because Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro represented so many of the defendants. Eventually the case was dismissed; Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro "...urged that the statute of limitations had long since run on any claim by the corporation, and that the real dispute, if any, was between the beneficiaries and the trustees of the Henry Miller Trust." [Bates oral history, pp. 54-55]

Bowles: The case went on for a good ten years. In 1963 it was really settled, decided--whatever it was.

But it had been true that George Nickel, his cousin, had gotten a lawyer from Bakersfield called C. Ray Robinson, and he was really kind of an ambulance chaser type, but very bright and very good. Actually, it was just a terrible mess, I suppose you might say, because George had gone through bankruptcy, and he had been having a really big problem. So he felt by bringing this suit that he would be able to get something out of it, and actually it turned out to be kind of a good thing, I guess.

Riess: For everyone.

Bowles: Well, for everyone, I suppose you'd say so, but it was very unpleasant and very upsetting, to Henry's mother, to Henry--to all of us, really.

We'd been perfectly happy. Nobody was really looking for the next generation to get any money. But as it turned out, that was what finally happened, because the remaindermen--one of them was Henry's mother, and the other was George Nickel's father, and

Leroy--the three of them, they were children of Nellie Miller Nickel. So they were the remaindermen that were getting this big income, and the children I guess were jealous, or anxious to get money of their own, particularly George Nickel, who was in bankruptcy.

So that was how that happened, and it was just most unpleasant. Many prominent people that had been trying to help Miller and Lux were named, and it was so awkward and very unpleasant, just terrible. Because they really weren't responsible. It was one of those things, that Miller and Lux had gone through the Depression, and there was a lot of land that had to be sold. And we had all known about those oil wells that Houchin had drilled.

The long and short of it was that Leroy Nickel shot himself, which I thought was really sad, although he was not a very admirable person. It was really a tragedy, and it interfered in our lives.

Henry was on the telephone every night for about an hour, or two hours, talking about it, because Amy, Henry's sister, was married to John Lawrence, and she decided to contact Mr. Neylan, and Mr. Neylan--John Francis Neylan--he was very old, but he loved a fight. So when he heard about this--and he liked Amy--he took it on. And nothing pleased him more than to take on Ray Robinson. [laughter]

Actually, Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro didn't come in until the very end. So we went through ten years. No wonder you thought Henry was a lawyer, because we learned all of these phrases and legal terms, and it went in one court and out the other, and it was just an endless thing. It was very unpleasant. But anyway, it was finally settled, and that was good.

Riess: But for that period, everyone was at odds, and suspicious.

Bowles: Oh, it was just terrible. It was just terrible.

Riess: Who was Henry closest to in the family?

Bowles: His brother [George Bowles]. Henry and his brother and his sister were very close, all three of them. And Mr. Neylan's advice I thought was excellent: he said, "Now, you three must always hang together, no matter what." That was true. It really did make a difference. And it was against the Nickels, I guess you might say. George Nickel was--it was sad, because Henry had grown up with him and really liked him as a cousin, you know. But he was

kind of a desperate fellow, so that didn't make it very easy. But anyway, we're all friends now.

Riess: What happened in the San Francisco community? Did they close around you in a protective way?

Bowles: No, there was quite a feeling of--nothing about me, because I was really not that connected. But I thought with Henry's brother, they did not let him into the P.U. [Pacific-Union] Club, for example, because so many of them that were being sued were on the committee. That was kind of a ridiculous thing, but you know, that's the way people are. I think it hurt a lot of people, and especially George Bowles, who was pretty sensitive. It was just kind of a cruel thing. But that's the way it was.

Riess: Yes. That's very hard.

Hunting and Fishing

Riess: You said in the beginning of your essay on the porcelains that you and Henry shared an interest in shooting and fishing. Was that something that you picked up when you got married, or had you been shooting and fishing earlier?

Bowles: Well, I had never been shooting, but I had always loved to fish. My sister and her husband had a place in Wyoming, and I went out there one year. The minute I caught a fish, a trout, I was absolutely shaking with delight, absolutely loved it. I've always adored fishing. So when Henry liked it, it just fit in, because he was a great perfectionist and did it beautifully. I've become pretty good myself. You know, we were very much purists, nothing but dry fly and that sort of thing. And it's a fascinating thing.

The duck hunting--I guess I really like the out of doors, so I would just follow him. It was rough and rugged, and we would stay out for hours waiting for birds. I never became a very good shot, but I always enjoyed it. I just loved being outdoors and feeling alive.

Riess: I thought the idea of the duck hunting was that it was a men's weekend out.

Bowles: We got that straightened out very early on. [laughs] I said, "There's no way you're going to go duck hunting without me." But I was lucky to be able to say that, because we had duck hunting

available on the Miller and Lux land that was down there, which we still own.

Ordinarily I wouldn't have been able to do that. Now, in these later years, women have joined duck clubs--at least, their husbands bring them along. But in those early days, no, a woman just didn't go at all. They just simply weren't invited, because it's much too expensive a sport to take a woman. But I wanted to be there, and Henry wanted me to be with him.

Riess: It's funny, I didn't think the ducks were an issue. I thought it was the idea of the men getting away. But it is fun?

Bowles: It's absolutely fascinating. It is a thrill. A lot of people don't feel that way. I just happen to like to be part of the action, whatever it is.

Riess: Why don't you describe a great morning of duck hunting.

Bowles: Well, Henry would be so excited he just wouldn't sleep practically the whole night before, and he'd get up at something like two and start making breakfast and banging things around the kitchen. I must say, I didn't always like to get up that early, but you get up when it's pitch dark. It was often four or five.

Then you put on waders, and you have breakfast, and everybody's in a great state. You walk out to your blind, through heavy mud, and that is the thrill. It's just so beautiful. It really is. The sunrise is magnificent, and then the birds start to come in. It is a thrill that--there is nothing like it, absolutely nothing like it. They just come in, and you're paralyzed, because you don't know which one to try to shoot, and they come very close. In those early days, of course, it was marvelous. Now it's dropped off a lot. But it was a thrill.

We had a team and a wagon that would take us out to the blind, and also pick us up. I'd always say to Henry, "Well, now I'm tired. Can't I go in?" "Oh," he'd say, "no, wait until eleven o'clock. The sprig will fly." [laughs] And the sprig didn't fly, but I'd often stay out until twelve or one o'clock. And when you've gotten up at four, and you've had nothing much to eat, and you sat there waiting for these birds--it's not easy. And you're very tired, but it's a wonderful feeling.

Then there's the camaraderie of coming in and asking the other people how well they did. And you learn a lot about the different birds. I had to learn to identify birds, which I really didn't know much about. Henry was such an <u>expert</u> at everything, it made it fun. He was often quite cranky, actually, because it

is very nerve-racking. I see very well, so I would always be able to tell him where the birds were coming from, so lots of time I'd forget to shoot because I was so busy telling him where the birds were coming from. But he knew the birds, identified them easily, so I learned a lot that way.

Riess: Did you say that the sprig were coming?

Bowles: Sprig.

Riess: What is that?

Bowles: Well, a sprig is a kind of duck, and it's a most magnificent bird. It's just stunning, really. It's almost as pretty as a mallard, and you know how beautiful a mallard is. Sprig is just marvelous. In the East they call them something else--I'm trying to think of what they call them [pintail]. But they're a beautiful bird, and wonderful eating, and they're a good-sized bird. The birds are so healthy, and it was just a very exciting thing for me.

I still love it. I always said if I was a rich old lady I'd have the best duck blind in California! But unfortunately, duck shooting has dropped off so that you just can't have that good a duck blind anymore. [laughs]

But as I say, I really love the out of doors. I also love to ski. We skied together a lot. He was a better skier than I was, but we really had fun skiing together. That's the kind of a person I like to be with, I must say. I've noticed that.

Riess: Did he teach you to shoot?

Bowles: Yes, he did. And of course, the other thing he did which made my life simply marvelous, I always had the best equipment. I mean, I've known men that take their wives out, and you get some old raincoat that belonged to your grandfather or something. He bought me the very best; I had nothing but the best guns and the best everything--the best fishing rods.

I have in fact a pair of 20-gauge Purdys. Someone said, "Gee, somebody would marry you for those, Connie!" [laughter] They are just the top English gun. And he always wanted me to have the very best. I think it made it--. When you talk to people about sports, you will find--you probably know this--the best equipment always makes it so much more interesting and just aesthetically it's a wonderful thing.

And of course, the wonderful experiences that I've had going with a lot of men fishing in Alaska or fishing in Iceland, and

nothing but men--only once in a while there would be a wife. I really have looked at men in a very different way because I've gotten to know them, and I have a lot to talk to them about--all kinds of equipment and all kinds of guns. And it's fun to see what a good time men have together, without any idea of any flirtation or anything like that.

Riess: What would you say was the way to be with these men? Is it to be more like the boys?

Bowles: I think so, yes, to just be a good sport. Just to keep up with them. And of course, they're very nice to you, because they know that you aren't quite as strong. But there's never any feeling, as I say, of a flirtation or anything. Men when they're away from their wives usually, if they're interested in fishing and hunting, are just delightful.

Riess: And they could ignore you as a woman.

Bowles: They could, but they don't. They just couldn't be nicer. They include you in everything, and you never feel as though you're in the way. They're really marvelous.

Riess: Who did you shoot with mostly when you went down to the ranch?

Bowles: Oh, we'd invite friends down for the weekends, and things like that, but as far as the shooting went, I always shot with Henry, pretty much always. I really have never shot with anybody else much. But we'd invite all of our friends down.

We'd go pheasant shooting too, and the wives, they hadn't been taught, they hadn't been told, they hadn't been given a good gun, and it was always a little dangerous. It worried me. Somebody would walk along beside you, a woman walking along beside you with a gun that she didn't know how to load, it's pretty frightening, and her husband's out there, and you don't dare say--although I probably should have been tougher, I suppose--but all she'd have to do is point the gun in another direction and have it go off, and that's it. It's really not terribly funny, because they love to talk as they'd walk along. It's something that you really have to concentrate on. You're not allowed many mistakes with a gun, I must say. [laughs]

The Wedding, in New Jersey

Riess: Were both of your families keen on the marriage between the two of you?

Bowles: My mother made the most priceless remark. She was so delightful. Henry's mother couldn't have been nicer, but when she called my mother to say, "The children are engaged," my mother said, "Oh, I wish I'd introduced Connie to more boys!" [laughter] And his mother never got over it. I think my mother always thought that no one was ever quite good enough. But no, she liked Henry very much.

Riess: That's amusing. Sort of an unconscious remark.

Bowles: Right! She was kind of like that, too. [laughs] She wasn't a great one for people marrying, unless they were just the perfect person, I guess. And maybe she always thought there was a perfect person that didn't exist. I don't know. Henry really didn't have any money, so that if she was thinking about that, that was perfectly true. Which I think was much better, looking back at it.

Riess: So was yours really a wartime marriage?

Bowles: Yes. He had to wait to become a first lieutenant before we could get married. He had to go to officer candidate school, and as soon as he graduated we were married, having no idea how long he'd be in the States. But as it was, he was here for a year and a half, and we managed to have two children, so--! [laughs] It was quite remarkable. Anyway.

Riess: Did you have a big wedding?

Bowles: A rather big wedding back in New Jersey at my sister's, because he was stationed at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. So we had it at my sister's house, which was charming, in Green Village, New Jersey. We just had Tania Crocker Whitman, and my friend Joan [Ehrman] Avenali.

On Money, and Eccentricity

Bowles: Incidentally, I was going to tell you a little bit about her [Tania Crocker Whitman]. I don't know whether that would interest you at all, because I was thinking back about my talk about Sarah

Lawrence. When I went there, I became very friendly with Tania Whitman, because she came from San Francisco, and she was a Crocker. She was very impressed with that.

Riess: Who was impressed with that?

Bowles: Tania was.

Riess: That she was a Crocker?

Bowles: Yes. But she was a very unusual girl, very talented, but very eccentric. She wasn't impressed with the money so much as the fact that the Crockers were who they were. She was brought up in San Francisco, in Hillsborough. She was very, very nice to me, and I understood her. And this will amuse you, but I think I understood her because of knowing my brother so well. She was eccentric in the same way he is, sort of no sense of what it's like not to have any money, at all.

And there's no way anyone can understand what it is not to have money if they have never known it. It's just a very different life, and a very different feeling. Now, maybe this is just all up here, but I think unless people have known what it's like not to have money there's no way they can just say, "Oh, well, I can imagine what it's like."

Riess: Do you feel that you have this sense?

Bowles: I think that I have known what it's like not to have money, yes.

Riess: Because of the early days of your marriage?

Bowles: Because of the early days of my marriage, yes. And I think it was a happy experience, which I think a lot of people miss if they've always had money. Do you know what I'm saying? They don't really--and people don't treat them the same as other people. People with money--I'm funny, but I think people with money are treated differently. I'm saying with a lot of known money, like the Crocker money, I think people like that are treated differently. They're never treated just the same as anyone else.

Riess: But why did your brother feel that way? I'm surprised at that. I mean, it seems to me that your family was sufficiently close to the workers on the waterfront.

Bowles: I know. It's so strange.

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Bowles: Tom was treated as a special person. [laughter] And I'm not jealous of him at all, but it was just that he was treated differently. Because he was a boy, I guess, that's got to be it. Anyway, I wanted to tell you that.

Returning Home, Nannies

Riess: So you started out living in New Jersey?

Bowles: Yes, we found the most marvelous house for $100 a month, completely furnished. The lady that owned it just thought we were wonderful, and everything seemed to go so beautifully. I couldn't imagine anything better. All of our friends from San Francisco came back and stayed with us, and it was just delightful.

And then, of course, unfortunately, Henry had to go overseas after about a year and a half, and that was very hard. I had to come back to San Francisco and live at my father's house, which was not easy, with two small children. And he would not let me go out, because he was sure I was going to fall in love with somebody. So that was hard. But it was probably good for me.

Riess: You had your children really right away.

Bowles: Yes. They were thirteen months apart. I was really busy. It was interesting. They're very good friends, so that's nice. And my father had no one there because my mother had died, so my father thought my little boy Henry was his! By the time Henry came home, he [my father] had taken him over completely. They were always very close, and that was a good thing, a nice thing.

Riess: Unless you had a nanny you could have hardly enjoyed those first two years of marriage.

Bowles: Well, we had actually quite a good--well, no, it wasn't really a babysitter. I guess we actually had a cook, which was kind of nice, for $75 a month, so that was helpful.

But we had an awfully good time. It didn't seem to matter. I don't know, it all worked out so well. Henry was sort of old-fashioned about that, too. He said, "Oh, we've got to have a nurse. My mother always had a nurse for us, and we have to have a nurse." And I said, "No way are we going to have a nurse. I'm raising these children myself. I'm not letting somebody else."

I always felt that a nurse was a poor idea, I really did. Even if I'd been able to afford it, I wouldn't have had a nurse. I felt that Henry had missed a lot by being raised by a nurse.

You know, people seemed to feel that there were certain things they had to do, and one of them was to have a nurse for the children, no matter whether they really could afford it or not. The children were always kind of shunted upstairs to a little room they called the nursery, and given their food on a tray, and I thought that was a ridiculous way to live. I just wasn't going to have that.

So my children, I never really had a nurse. I might have had somebody to help with the cooking, but I really didn't want anyone else ruining them--. [laughs] If anybody was going to ruin them, I was going to do it myself. Which I probably did.

Riess: Was the idea behind that that the women, the mothers, had other, more important things to do? As it is now, you couldn't just be raising children?

Bowles: Well, I think people in those days felt that a social life was a very important thing. I remember Henry saying that his mother and father went out to a black tie dinner almost every night, so they had to have a nurse. I mean, that was the way it was! And the Dean Witters--everybody was trying to keep up with everyone else. Probably no different than it is today! But you had to have a nurse.

I knew many of my friends had nurses, and they [friends] did the cooking. I thought that seemed ridiculous. I mean, why should the nurse have all the fun with the children, and you're down in the kitchen cooking their dinner? That's ridiculous. I felt strongly about it, and I think I've been right. But anyway, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing I raised them myself.

Book Collecting, Derrydale Press

Riess: You were close to New York. Did you spend a lot of time there? You said that you had discovered book collecting. Was that an interest the two of you had in common, or did you create that interest together? I know that you earlier had been introduced to book collecting.

Bowles: Well, yes, I had, as you know, in Paris. But then everything about Henry seemed to be just what I was looking for, too. He

loved books, and he had been left a beautiful set of Audubon that his grandmother had given him. So he had a great appreciation of beautifully bound books. We did go into New York to all the wonderful little old bookshops--and I'm trying to think of the names of some of them. Then when we moved to Chicago there were some good ones there, too. We wouldn't spend very much: seven-fifty was a lot for a book, or even twelve dollars.

But what really brought Henry to the big collection that he has made were the Derrydale Press books, which were sporting books, fishing and hunting.

Riess: I wondered if there was a focus.

Bowles: Yes. And they were on sale because the war had come along.

This very wealthy man had decided that he wanted to publish books, Derrydale Press books, that would be like English sporting books, only American. His name was Eugene [V.] Connett, and he's very well-known. But in any case, he had a man called Ernest [R.] Gee as his publisher. The books were going to be a huge success, but suddenly the war came along, and no one was buying books. So they sold them for two and three dollars, and they were books that were ten or fifteen dollar books.

We bought them, sent them as Christmas presents to our friends, and kept copies for ourselves. It was just a wonderful fun thing. Henry has almost a complete collection of Derrydale books, which I have at home. I'm sure it's worth a fortune.

Riess: And that press was in New York?

Bowles: The press itself I believe was in Connecticut. I'm not sure. But the books were sold at the various bookshops in New York.

Riess: You listed the presses that you collected as Golden Cockerel, Derrydale, Grabhorn, Arion, Bird and Bull. Only Grabhorn and Arion are West Coast?

Bowles: That's right.

Riess: The others have a sporting sound, don't they? The Golden Cockerel?

Bowles: There's a rooster that represents the crest of the Golden Cockerel, but they were usually more a different type of thing, more poetry.

But from the Derrydale we then developed into the rest of the press books. Also early on in San Francisco there was the Colt Press, which Bill Roth had started, young Bill Roth, Mrs. Roth's son. He was our very good friend, we knew him very well. In fact, he was in love with my friend Tania Whitman, we always thought. But nothing ever came of it.

"New York Was Never Better"

Bowles: There was sort of a little circle of us. We fancied ourselves as intellectuals, I think, Bill Roth, and Tania--Henry was sort of on the fringe. We brought him in. [laughs]

Riess: It was a circle of four?

Bowles: Well, Bill Swinerton and Polly Clark--about six people--Larry Murphy. We thought we were a little special group. [laughs] Ridiculous.

This group went East to school. Bill Roth went to Yale. We were in the East, so we saw quite a lot of them. I guess we were still going out, as they call it, in New York, while they--how did that work? Well, they were back and forth a lot, too, from California. They came to visit us. I guess we were married fairly young, because they were still not married, so they'd come out to visit us on the weekends sort of thing.

But before that, Henry and I went out in New York a lot, and we went to--what's that famous restaurant?--"21" a lot for dinner. Then we'd go to the El Morocco and the Stork Club, and places like that--we loved to go out.

Riess: And he was in uniform?

Bowles: Yes. And I'd get all dressed up, and we could have a marvelous time for twenty dollars for the whole evening, and we thought we were absolutely special. I'd go back and stay at the Junior League rooms in the Waldorf. It was just a very romantic, exciting time, I would say, and New York was never better. It was marvelous. It was interesting.

Riess: And we were at war, too. Do you think there was a feeling of danger?

Bowles: Yes. I think you figured that, how long did you really have? It was in the back of your mind. We never talked about it the way

people do now about dying, about how long do you have. We never thought about that. You never discussed it, anyway.

I'm so bored with people always talking about going to rest homes, or whatever they're going to do. Oh! You never said, "Oh, maybe we won't be here next week." We never felt that. I never did, anyway. It's so odd. But when you're young, you don't have those feelings. You never think about that. I don't know, am I making any sense?

Riess: Yes!

Bowles: That's good.

Riess: Was it the bindings that you were most attracted to in the book collecting?

Bowles: Well, the Derrydale covers all kinds of sports--skiing and fishing and everything, sailing--.

Riess: Did you read the books?

Bowles: Oh, yes, yes. That was another thing my brother used to say: "You do nothing but buy fine books, and you don't ever read them." But of course, Henry--we read them all. Yes, we really did.

One of the best buys I made, sort of starting Henry on the sporting books, was I found a set of Surtees--[Robert Smith] Surtees is a famous English sporting writer--I found a set for twelve dollars, which we still have. There are five volumes, and they are famous, and they're very humorous. They're really good stories, and all about hunting and bound in red morocco.

Sporting Life, Social Life, Wartime

Bowles: It all tied in with our lives. It was so curious, because my sister and her husband had taken up hunting--not fox hunting, because they'd call it drag hunting back there. Henry used to go up on weekends, we'd go up weekends, and he'd never done anything like that before. They'd give him a horse and he'd go off hunting. [laughs] I was too busy having babies, so I didn't go. So it was just sort of a sporting life.

People used to say to us, my sister would say, "Henry should never get out of the service. He's never really had a job, so he's probably never going to work. Really, he ought to stay in

the army." Well, of course, it would make us perfectly furious. Of course he's not going to stay in the army! But he was kind of a sporting person, and that appealed to me tremendously, because my father had been so serious about business. I thought, this is so much fun. It was very light-hearted, and he had a very optimistic outlook. That was really a change for me.

Riess: But just enough of the intellectual thing.

Bowles: Exactly, exactly. There was a book that we had both read, I think it was a very popular book, The Green Bay Tree, by Louis Bromfield. Anyway, we had both read it, and when we discovered we had both loved it we fell madly in love, and it was just a wonderful romance, it really was.

Riess: Did you know any writers or artists or people like that in New York? Did your acquaintance run to the whatever it might have been, the bohemian New York?

Bowles: No, we really didn't. We fell into a pattern in New Jersey, because that was also kind of stylish, and there were people that had graduated from Princeton that we met. No, it was more of I guess a social life, you would call it. No, we didn't really meet any authors or writers.

Riess: You said last time that Henry had once jokingly said to you that if you hadn't married him you would have married a Jewish intellectual English professor or something like that. Apropos of what could you imagine he might have said that?

Bowles: Oh, you know how you sit around with somebody and say, "Who would you have married if you hadn't married me?"

Riess: I think it would be an inflammatory conversation, actually.

Bowles: Oh, do you? [laughter]

Riess: I guess it would be fun to have when everything was going well.

Bowles: Oh, yes. Well, everything was going well. Yes, oh absolutely. We really got along remarkably well. Of course, there were times we disagreed terribly. But I think he meant it kindly. And I always remembered it, because I thought when I met Jim Hart--I mean, I'd already known Jim Hart, but when I really started to think about him, I was amused by it.

Of course, I'd kidded Jim Hart unmercifully about that too, though, because I said, "My father said they're nothing but parlor-pinks at Berkeley, and lounge lizards, and you know how

professors are, they're always associating with their students, and you never can trust them." This is all in a joke. I mean, it would have to be. But it was true, that was the way my father felt. I said to him my father would kill me if he knew I was marrying a Berkeley professor! [laughs]

Riess: And your brother probably had many of those attitudes, too.

Bowles: Actually, he was very fond of Jim Hart. So it was interesting. But anyway.

Riess: Henry went overseas for a year and a half, you came back here. But you lived in Chicago for a while also?

Bowles: We were moved there because he was studying Japanese, and he was going to the University of Chicago to study Japanese. We had the most marvelous time in Chicago. I guess it's just being young, but we loved it. The Museum of Science and Industry, we would go there almost every day and have lunch there. I don't know how we did it; we took the children, I think. We had a circle of friends that were in the army that we liked a lot.

I don't know; it all seemed wonderful. Maybe just looking back it seems wonderful, but at the time, it did too. I thought it was just marvelous.

Riess: And so it was after he learned the Japanese that he went overseas?

Bowles: Yes, he went to Japan. He was supposed to be on MacArthur's staff, and he went all through the Philippines. I have incredible letters that he wrote, a lot of them in code he had carefully figured out. He had quite an experience going all through the Philippines, and he did get malaria, but I think it was all an interesting experience for him.

Riess: Then he returned to the Bay Area from the Philippines, and got the job with Standard Oil.

Bowles: Yes, now Chevron.

Lage Carlson, Bookbinder

Riess: Did you continue the book collecting, or binding, in his absence? I know you talked about coming back from your trip in 1938 and meeting Mrs. Walter, and Belle McMurtry Young.

Bowles: Yes. No, I didn't continue it because I found it was a very expensive thing to do. It really was. Although I probably might have done it, but I didn't have time, and I didn't pursue it at all.

Riess: Your continuing interest in fine bindings and fine printing?

Bowles: Well, I had a wonderful time later in life, because I met Lage Carlson, who was a binder. I took a beautiful Moby Dick that was done by the Arion Press out to him and had him bind the book. It is so beautiful.

He bound several books for me, and it was so creative, I really enjoyed it. I mean, he would bring out the different colored leathers, and we would talk about it, and the different strings and colors, and it was just a very creative process. Sort of like designing a dress. It was just wonderful, and Henry had fun with me doing that, too.

We got a little bit into modern bindings later. I have some lovely bindings by an English binder, too. Lage Carlson, I don't know what's happened to him. He was quite a good binder. He was a Buddhist of some kind. It was really quite an experience. He lived out in the Haight-Ashbury. I went into his room--I'll never forget it--and he had a bed on the floor, and some kind of a dresser with only three legs, and he had books holding up the other corner! He was a character.

Riess: Did you continue to see the Morgan Gunsts in San Francisco and see what he would have brought back?

Bowles: No, I really didn't. I have seen Marjorie over the years. Then Marjorie became very friendly with Henry, because Henry was extremely interested in the library, and the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library. So he and Marjorie became best of friends. I really didn't have the time, or seemed to do something else.

Riess: That is not something that we need pursue?

Bowles: No, I wouldn't say so. Although Henry became president of the California Historical Society, and I did have to do quite a lot with that. I headed up a woman's board there, and that was interesting.

I always felt that my role for Henry was to give him confidence, because he really was a very shy person, and it was hard for him to project. I always sort of worried about him. Maybe I mothered him. I don't think I did, but I always wanted

to--. As he'd say to me, "You have enough confidence for both of us," and I think it was more or less true. I always felt that I should be a backup for him. Maybe that was the way I was raised. Looking back, I think that has been my role.

More on Those First Ten Years, in Berkeley

Riess: Just to pursue this for a minute, why do you think the years in Berkeley were the best?

Bowles: Well, we had a wonderful house. I loved the house. We both loved to garden. We had a new baby, which was fun.

Riess: That was the third child?

Bowles: Yes, and it wasn't such a struggle. And the friends--the Donald McLaughlins, and Jack [John W.] and Rose Oswald lived across the street. Jack was a vice-president at Berkeley, and then he became president of Penn State, and they now live back there. He knew Jim Hart very well. In fact, he worked with Jim Hart--so curious, all these sorts of connections.

I think that that was good for both of us. Although I missed the city, and I missed my city friends, I didn't miss them that much. I think the independence was very good, it really was. We had a college girl to help with the children, which was nice. I might say, most of my friends were living in a more grand manner because they had a nurse and they were doing the cooking!

Riess: Did you belong to clubs in the city, or in Berkeley?

Bowles: I belonged to Francisca Club since I was eighteen, because they had taken us in on some bargain rate.

Riess: Did your mother?

Bowles: No, she was not a club person at all. But Henry--that was the only time we ever borrowed any money. We used to laugh about that, because we decided that we were in Berkeley and we were a little more prosperous, I guess.

After those ten years he was making a little more, and things were looking up. He had an opportunity to join the Pacific-Union Club, so for the first time we borrowed some money, and we bought a second car--I'll never forget it--and I think a new vacuum cleaner, and he joined the P.U. Club. [laughter] There were

three things that we did [with the borrowed money]. We felt we were just the snappiest things in the world. The second car was the most impractical car in the world. He always loved a sports car.

You see, I saw in him the sporting person which I just loved. He loved a fancy car, he loved all those kinds of things. We bought a car that was like an MG, only it was a Singer, an English car. It had no top, and it was crazy, wild but fun. And we drove down Highway 1 all the way to San Simeon one time in it, with no top on the car! It was an adventure for me all the time. I felt it was an adventure, and I liked that.

Riess: You must have made life so much fun for him.

Bowles: We had a good time.

Riess: Could he have gone to the top, do you think, at Standard Oil?

Bowles: He had started to do very well, he really had. It was funny, because there was a man, Otto Miller, who was president, who took an interest in Henry. That I always felt was too bad, because when this Miller and Lux thing came along he really had to give up and go to San Francisco and work for Miller and Lux. That he had to do for quite a few years, until the lawsuit ended.

Bowles Farming, Connie's Head for Business

Bowles: Then we took our own land in Los Banos and formed Bowles Farming, Henry, Amy, and Corky--George, his brother--and that was twenty-five years ago. Bowles Farming is still going strong, and my young son Philip is very active in it, I'm happy to say. It's not been easy, but it's been interesting for me, I've had a very interesting time with it. I'm just an observer really, but I do take a big interest in it.

Riess: How much of a holding is it?

Bowles: We farm about eight thousand acres, so that's a lot. The children essentially own the land, and Bowles Farming--George Bowles and I are partners to keep the land. To run it is our business. We also lease some land from relatives, from the Nickel children, they want us to farm. And it's been a struggle, but we've done very well with it, and I'm proud of it. It's just great, and rewarding.

Riess: How occupied are you by those concerns? How much time would you say you put into it?

Bowles: I don't spend much, but I talk to my son on the telephone about it, and I go to meetings at least once a month, when they meet down in Los Banos, and when they meet in town. I keep abreast of it, that's all I can say, I'm very interested in it.

Riess: Do you have a head for business, would you say?

Bowles: I think I have a certain amount of common sense. That I think I have. I've been very lucky in encouraging the--well, we've acquired some land over the years, and I've been very fortunate in talking people into selling. That has been my role, I would say, because we bought some property from a relative that was really a great thing to do, and several other pieces we've bought. If I have any sense of business, I think I'm fairly good at deciding or helping someone to sell it. That's been important.

Riess: A bunch of numbers thrown at you doesn't rattle you.

Bowles: Not any more. It did at first, but not any more. I don't think I'm a whiz at it or anything like that, but I understand it now. It doesn't frighten me the way it used to.

I don't like to blow my own trumpet, but it was just by luck that I called a cousin that we knew. I said, "Look, Mary, we really want to buy that land." She said, "Well, my gosh, the men are right at the door right now, but if you want it, we'll sell it to you." I was thrilled. It's been a big thing, because it was George Nickel's sister, and she was sick and tired of not getting any rent, and a few other things. The boys--George Bowles and Philip--were very hesitant to talk to her, because they were afraid that somebody would think there was too much pressure.

Anyway, it was very lucky. I'm not saying I was so great, but if it hadn't been for my call, we wouldn't have bought that, and I was thrilled. They were cute about it afterwards; they said well, they wouldn't want to do it. So I did it. And it's worked out well.

Riess: Is there any oil on that land?

Bowles: No. They've drilled several wells, and there's never been any oil.

Riess: So it hasn't been speculative.

Bowles: Not at all. No, it's been long, hard work, and really hard work. We just struggled, really, with it. And it's only been the last couple of years that it's done pretty well.

Henry really never took to it very much. He was never a farmer. You know how so many men like to ride a tractor, and you always feel they're frustrated farmers? Including my brother, he's always wanted to ride a tractor. Henry had absolutely no desire. He'd say to me, "You know, it'a just not anything that I really enjoy particularly. I'm not a farmer. We pay somebody to do it."

Farming never really caught his imagination the way the refinery did. He adored that, because it was engineering. They were figuring it out, and how the catalytic cracker worked, and all this sort of thing. It fascinated him. I was really sorry that he couldn't stay there. I think he felt very frustrated about it too. And as a result, he did a lot more sort of civic things, because he was not as interested in the farming as he might have been.

Consequences of the Miller and Lux Litigation

Riess: Why did he have to be the one? Why couldn't Corky have been the one?

Bowles: Well, because Henry had to go to work for Miller and Lux. In the settlement of the Miller and Lux trial the parties had to agree that George Nickel would be one vice-president and Henry would be the other, representing the Bowles side of the family. And because he was the oldest son, he just assumed that he would.

And at that point I think Corky [George M. Bowles] was too young, because he's eleven years younger than Henry. I think they just never considered Corky. Henry always sort of overpowered Corky, too. Actually, scholastically he was probably much brighter than Corky, which I think Corky would admit. Corky is a marvelous person, too, and with a lot more common sense.

Henry had sort of a scientific mind, and I wouldn't say a whole lot of just horse sense, common sense. He was daring, and he'd do things that were really kind of foolish.

Riess: With you behind him! [laughter]

Bowles: One example is really amusing in my mind. I've told it before. But he had a new four-wheel drive jeep, and we were down at Los Banos, and there was a huge ditch. He was a wild driver. I said to Henry, "I am getting out of this car, because I am not going to go through that ditch with you." He said, "All right, go ahead." So I got out, and he went tearing through the ditch and the car turned over on its side.

He got up out of the side, and he looked back up and he said, "Why didn't you tell me this ditch was here?" [laughter] A crazy, wild driver. He loved fast cars, and just a fast kind of a life. Somebody pulling back on him. But no, I don't think I did that much.

Riess: That's not exactly the farming life.

Bowles: That you visualize.

Riess: The tractor moves only so fast down the field. But there is the adventure of seeing whether you reap what you sow, or something like that.

Bowles: That is true, and I always hoped to make him very interested in business, because of my father, and because I had grown up that way. He never really was, and he'd say to me, "You know, I don't really care about making money. It doesn't really interest me." I would be upset by that, because I thought, "He darn well should be!"

But it never really did interest him. It's funny. He said, "I don't understand it. We have a certain amount of money now, and I really just can't see struggling to make more. It doesn't interest me."

Riess: You lived through the lawsuit then from '53 to '63.

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: That was his occupation?

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: Did he go to an office?

Bowles: Yes, he had an office downtown. There was a wonderful man that was president, which made it helpful, because the lawyers realized that they just couldn't leave these two boys arguing with one another. They had a man called Marsden Blois, who'd been a vice-president at the Bank of America. He was a great duck hunter, and

he and Henry got along just famously. He liked Henry much better than he liked George Nickel, so it worked out very well.

That was a nice business experience for Henry, and he learned a lot from him, and they became very close friends. That was very nice, because Henry had lost his father when he was only fifteen or sixteen. I thought it was a wonderful experience for Henry.

Riess: After the suit was settled, then what was the next work phase?

Bowles: Well, that was when they divided up the property. The Nickels took one-half of the ranch, and we took the other. There was a certain amount of--let's see, what would we call it?--it was really relief. And the animosity was over. And that's when Amy and Corky and Henry decided to form Bowles Farming and farm it ourselves.

Buena Vista Lake

Bowles: This is what happened about Buena Vista Lake, and I'd like this to be very clear, because I am extremely clear about it. And this will show you a little bit of what George's personality was like. It's not that I don't like him, but he's just not a person that Henry could trust.

He and George had often spoken of farming the Buena Vista Lake themselves. The Buena Vista Lake was a piece that had been left in Miller and Lux that was twenty-five thousand acres. It was a lake bed outside of Bakersfield, and a beautiful piece of property, because there were no cuts and divides in it. You could just run a tractor right through it, dozens of tractors.

Well, George Nickel got into trouble again financially, so he had to borrow from a company called the J. G. Boswell Company. J. G. Boswell was a smart man, I know him well. He waited until George got in deep enough--and he had borrowed on his interest in the property on the Buena Vista Ranch. Boswell waited until the propitious moment, and George Nickel lost his land to J. G. Boswell, so the rest of the family was forced to either sell out or take Boswell stock.

Henry chose to take Boswell stock, and we still in a way own the ranch--I mean, we don't own it, J. G. Boswell owns that beautiful piece of property. Some people in the family, like

Sally Mein, also took Boswell stock. Henry's brother took cash and some stock, very little. So that was the way it ended up.

Riess: The stock pays a dividend?

Bowles: It pays a dividend, and it's in the J. G. Boswell Company, which is probably the largest farming company in the world. They own it, and they farm it, and they've done very well with it. They're fantastic farmers, they're really good. The stock has appreciated in value, but probably if you'd taken cash you would have done better.

Riess: Now, what is Rio Bravo?

Bowles: That was George Nickel. He was always coming up out of the blue from someplace. [laughs] He has illusions of grandeur, and he started--. He's bought all kinds of land. He thought he was Henry Miller, for one thing. He bought some land down near Bakersfield, and he started a club--not really a club, it's like a fancy motel--called Rio Bravo. He received all kinds of publicity, and tried to make it into a tennis ranch like John Gardner's, and then he proceeded to lose it. He doesn't own it any more. But it's outside of Bakersfield, and it's not really that attractive.

Riess: Do you know his wife well?

Bowles: Dodo Nickel--yes, fairly well. She was Dodo Rock, and she came from Santa Barbara. Her sister Mary was married to Alex Sherriffs. She's quite a nice person.

It's a second marriage. George had five children, and she had three. So they had the eight children between them. His first wife Charlotte, she and his rather unstable brother [John Beverly Nickel] got in an airplane in Los Banos, a small plane, on a foggy day, and went up, and fifteen minutes later the plane crashed and they were both killed instantly. That left George with five children, and Bev's wife was left with two. Just brand new. They told them not to go up, but anyway. And that was right in the middle of the lawsuit! Can you imagine? Unbelievable. Poor George. I think he's been very happy with Dodo.

Anyway, I've talked so much I'm absolutely exhausted!

Connie and Henry Bowles grouse shooting, Scotland, 1978 (above) and pheasant shooting, Los Banos, California, 1977 (below).

Amanda Bowles Michael, granddaughter; Beatrice Virginia Bowles, daughter; Constance Crowley Bowles; Peter Cannon Michael, grandson; Henry Miller Bowles, son.

IV BEHIND THE BOWLES PORCELAIN COLLECTION

[Interview 3: July 20, 1992] ##

The Bowles Gift, and Catalogue

Riess: Before we start, let's get on the record the reason why we are doing these tapes. Please tell me about the catalogue, and about your determination to make the gift to the Fine Arts Museums. When did that begin?

Bowles: Well, that began about six years ago. I started giving one or two pieces every year. This year, being 1992--well, I gave it mostly in 1991. I gave the largest gift then because, of course, there was the tax window, so it was a very good reason to do it, but also I'd been planning to do it.

Henry and I had always dreamt of having a porcelain gallery for our collection. Originally the museum had promised to redo the room. But then the earthquake came, so they have to do the entire museum for seismic repairs. And of course, the porcelain gallery is going to be even more magnificent. I'm very excited about that.

Simon Spero, an outstanding authority on porcelain, had agreed to write the catalogue, and the Fine Arts Museums have negotiated a contract with him. I will write the introduction. And he wants me to reminisce about little things that happened, to make a more interesting catalogue than if we just put everything down in a cut and dried manner.

The reason I wanted to do this on tape was I thought when the gallery opens, which will probably be in two years from now, it would be wonderful for people to have a tape of something that I had said about the collection, several pieces anyway. And in fact, I got the idea from the Phillips Collection, which is in

Washington, D.C., which is one of the most personal collections I've ever known. Mr. Phillips's father started it--this is all on paintings, not on ceramics.

It makes the collection come so alive if you can listen to the person that struggled to collect it. It makes it far more interesting. So that started me. And it was combining the idea of maybe using part of this for the introduction to the catalogue. So that's the whole story.

Living with Porcelain, The Chelsea Beakers

Bowles: And along those lines, if I'm not talking too much, I wanted to say that I had thought of it the other day, that Henry and I had each bought a Chelsea beaker from Winifred Williams. Henry's Chelsea beaker [Chelsea 21] was quite a lot more expensive than mine, and the pattern was the ho-ho bird. On the bottom of the ho-ho bird beaker--the little beaker is very small, only about four inches high--is the crown and trident mark. The crown and trident mark, there's something like only thirteen in the whole world that have that mark. That was very impressive. He was very proud of that mark.

I bought, at the same time or maybe just a year later, a little also-Chelsea beaker [Chelsea 22] in the acanthus pattern, and mine was I thought much more beautiful. It is flamboyant, flowing, and very intricate in design. We were always joking about the fact that his was so rare, but mine I thought was far prettier! We really had endless discussions. "Mine's better," "No, mine is better."

I thought that expressed in a way the way we did look at the collection, because I think he put rarity first, and I put beauty, I guess, first.

Riess: WHen he chose his did you say, "Well, I'm not really crazy about it"?

Bowles: No, I didn't, because I liked it very much. That was the other thing: we both liked the other one's beaker, but we each thought our own was better, for various reasons. I loved his, I thought it was charming, and I was very impressed with the mark and all that. But I just didn't feel that it was as pretty as mine.

Riess: And how did you store and keep you first pieces, you and Henry?

Bowles: We had so many in the house that we decided--we really dickered back and forth about where to make a room for the porcelain. We finally took our breakfast room and had it all redone with very special lighting, and silk behind the cabinets, and it's been just a joy. We used to eat most of our meals in there--I still do, in fact--and it was just so perfect, because we could sit in there and talk about the collection, which was right around us. It was really part of all our conversations.

I feel as though now that I've given it to the museum I don't miss it as much, because there really is no one to talk to about it, except on occasion, and nobody's really very interested for very long. [laughs] But it was a lot of fun to have it right there with us, it was marvelous.

Riess: Did you know, when you bought your first two or three pieces in the early sixties, that you were onto something that wasn't going to let you go?

Bowles: I think we did, because of the fact that Henry was basically a real collector, serious collector, and I was a collector as well, but with a little different outlook. I think that he recognized that if we were going to collect porcelain, that I might be tempted to buy a lot of different kinds of things. He felt that as a collector, it would be a far more interesting thing if we picked some dates and stayed within those dates, and also stayed pretty much with English.

It's very tempting, if you like porcelain--you know, there are just so many things that come along. You could buy Meissen, you could buy--well, there are just a million things. Chinese, Chinese export--you could get carried away. I've seen a lot of collections like that, and I think they're too diverse to be really very interesting. It's like stamps or anything, if you concentrate in a time period it makes it a lot more interesting. We distinctly did, when we started to be fairly serious about it, which was a long time ago now.

Riess: By diverse you would mean personal, but not personal in a good sense?

Bowles: Just kind of helter-skelter, just picking up things you like here and there. I think that does not make a very interesting collection. It's like a garden that has no point or no meaning. It has to have a plan. I think that it helped me a lot having Henry have a plan, and I went along--we agreed on the plan. I think it made it a far more interesting thing.

San Francisco Dealers, Rea Ashley, and Ceramic Circles

Riess: Was the first dealer in a way your first advisor?

Bowles: Yes! Mrs. [Rea] Ashley was really our first real dealer, on Union Street in San Francisco. She was just a very interesting person and very much of a scholar and a teacher. We spent a lot of time with her. I think she was extremely helpful. And the more we learned, it's like anything else, the more you know, the more you want to know. She was very instrumental in helping us.

Riess: In these interviews I'd like you to talk as much about the early dealers in the San Francisco area as you can. The only one that I knew was Merryvale, and that's gone.

Bowles: The first dealer, and you couldn't really call her a dealer, although she had an antique shop, was a little place out on Clement Street, Clement and Third. The lady's name was Adele Morton. She had quite a nice little collection, and she really started me. I bought my first pieces from her.

But Mrs. Ashley was the most scholarly person in San Francisco certainly. She gave quite a few pieces to the museum herself, because she had a collection that was good. Then of course she died, and that was that. The lady that ran Merryvale's [Mrs. Peggy McDonough] was never a particularly knowledgeable dealer. She was just a nice person with very good taste. I wouldn't have called her much of a dealer really. I think that I could say that Mrs. Ashley was really the most important local person in San Francisco.

Riess: As I went through your two books of photographs and cataloguing information it looked like 1967 was the earliest date of any of the pieces that you were collecting, and that was from Adele Morton. Ian Hunter also was 1967, and William Lautz?

Bowles: Oh, yes. He was a New York dealer. A lot of people bought from him. We bought a few things from him. It was fun to go to his place in New York. He lived in a brownstone, and I thought that was very exciting, because it had a pretty sitting room that looked out into a lovely garden, the way New York brownstones can. And he was quite a charming man. There was a lot of interest in Seattle, too, and he had sold to many people there.

The interest in Seattle came about because there was a very scholarly woman, Blanche Harmon, who formed a ceramic circle up there. In her circle she included Martha [Mrs. Henry] Isaacson [of Isaacson Steel Co.]. Mrs. Isaacson is still alive. She's

ninety-two. Mrs. Isaacson had enough imagination and wherewithal to go to Europe and look for various pieces that Mrs. Harmon in her ceramic classes was able to describe.

It takes a scholar to get people inspired, and then somebody with money to come along and take an interest.

Riess: When we first talked you mentioned the English Ceramic Circle. What is a ceramic circle? Is that a worldwide organization?

Bowles: No, that one is strictly English. When we first started collecting I thought I'd love to belong to the English Ceramic Circle. This very knowledgeable lady, Mrs. [Judson] Faulkner, a collector from Seattle, I spoke to her about it and she said to me, "Oh, you couldn't possibly get in," or something like that. "It's much too scholarly. No, they wouldn't take you." [laughs] I think she didn't mean to sound like that, but she acted as though there was no way in the world we would be accepted.

We found out later that it's just a matter of paying the dues and getting in it. They have meetings once a month, and members give papers, and the circle issues a bulletin every year of their transactions.

I think that our [San Francisco] ceramic circle was patterned after that. But the first one [ceramic circle] that I know of on the West Coast was started in Seattle. And there is also--and I've belonged to that from time to time, though I don't belong to it now--a circle called the American Ceramic Circle, and that's back East. They're very active. They meet at Williamsburg, and there are just so many people that are interested in that sort of thing.

The San Francisco one that Henry and several of the other people started, it's still extremely active, and they have about a hundred and thirty-five members, to my amazement, because that's been at least fifteen, twenty years. The museum [California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco] has now accepted them as part of the museum, and they're allowed to meet out there. And they're really given a little prestige. They were for a long time just considered eccentrics who were collecting I don't know what! [laughing] So they've come a long way. Harry Parker is very open and happy to have them, and it's really quite gratifying.

Riess: And if you're an active member of the circle, you present a paper?

Bowles: One might, yes. They have meetings once a month, and they have different speakers. They also have a Henry Bowles Seminar every

year. They've brought people from England, and they pay for their trips. People really are very flattered by it and enjoy it tremendously. It's been very interesting. I marvel that people have stayed as active as they have.

Getting into Collecting in 1967

Riess: Do you think that you got into collecting at a kind of peak time? In 1967? It's now more like twenty-five years later. Is there still the same kind of activity?

Bowles: No, no. Well, first, there's nothing available. It's just not out there, and if it is, it's so expensive that it's ridiculous to even think about it. But it's mostly because it's not there, it's just not available. I think we got into it at a very good time, but you know, as a collector, you always look back.

For example, the Shreiber Collection that is in the Victoria and Albert in London. Well, Mrs. Shreiber--it was Lady Shreiber, actually--and she and her husband had no children, and they had tons of money, and they did nothing but travel all over Europe, buying porcelain.

I have two huge volumes that are called Lady Charlotte Shreiber's Journals. They are fascinating. She just describes all what they did every day. I think her husband did most of the dealing part, and she did the buying, and she bought quantities. When I compare myself with that! That collection was the founding of the Victoria and Albert Porcelain Collection. The V & A has two big portraits of them in the porcelain gallery in the museum, at the far end of the room.

But prices were so reasonable then that it was very smart of her to start then. There was no chance for me to do that, but I think we were very fortunate--although at times we thought we were being rather extravagant--I think it was just very fortunate. Because after all, you can't be a collector if there's nothing available. We were really fortunate. It just was perfect timing.

Excitement of a Find, Honorable Dealers

Riess: When Lady Charlotte Shreiber was collecting, were some of these early Chelsea pieces in somebody's cottage, and not even known?

Bowles: Oh, absolutely. In fact, that was one thing I wrote down that I wanted to tell you today that always fascinated me, and maybe I've already told you. I hope not. But Henry and I were in Mr. [Hans] Weinberg's shop one day, and I'll never forget it, because he brought out a most beautiful Chelsea bowl, and he showed it to me and he said he was asking $200,000 for it. That was the most amount of money I'd ever heard of for any piece of Chelsea!

But in any case, he had received a letter, and he showed it to me, from a man--and I could check on what the man's name was, he was some very important Englishman--he had written from way up in the northern part of England saying that he had found this bowl in his mother's greenhouse. His mother had died. He said, "I always remember that Mother had the butler bring in the bowl, full of daffodils or tulips, and it was so pretty, but I didn't know whether it was of any value, so I'm sending you this photograph of it to see if it was worth anything."

Mr. Weinberg I'm sure picked it up for very little, but anyway, he was asking $200,000. It was so beautiful. I have never seen one before or since. So yes, those kinds of things I think happen. And from what I hear from dealers even today, one of their greatest sources are individuals coming in and saying, "What do you think of this? Is this worth anything?" And they buy that way. I think they do far better buying that way than they do at auction or any other way. That's the way most dealers get their things, I think.

Of course, nine times out of ten the thing isn't worth anything. But the one time that it is, it can be pretty special.

Riess: Is your impression of the dealers that they are honorable?

Bowles: Oh, generally, generally. But any dealer, you've got to look at them a little skeptically. I think one has to be very careful. Even they get fooled.

We did have one experience, we bought a pair of Bow apples, and we had some other dealer come and appraise the collection. As she was looking at one of the apples she took out a little pin--I'd never seen anyone do that--and she started touching it. Apparently she could feel that there was some kind of a gelatinous material on the outside of the apple. It had been mended in some way so that this material, she recognized it--. So we had to write to the dealer. He said he was absolutely shocked. I think he made good on that one apple, but of course it took away a little bit from the value, because a pair is always more sought after.

But no, these things happen all the time, I think. And the terrible thing is that today it's getting far worse. There is so little out there. Now people are saying, "Oh, that isn't right, this isn't right," it's getting much more difficult because things are more expensive. Then immediately somebody finds something wrong with it, so that is a problem too.

I hope that that isn't ever a problem with some of my pieces, because I have heard of a lot of things like that happening. I think that's very sad. I think it happens because of the fact that the prices have gone up so that people are kind of desperate, saying, "Oh, that can't be what it pretends to be."

On the other hand, we bought a pot one time, it was a coffee pot [Lowestoft 3]. We bought it as Worcester--in fact, we bought it at Merryvale's--and a dealer came along and said, "Oh, no, that's Lowestoft." That, of course, made it more valuable, because there are not as many Lowestoft coffee pots. That can be endless, and I think it's too bad to go into it too much, because it can be a matter of just identifying and arguing with somebody. I'm not sure that that's a good idea all the time. It gets to be boring, I think.

Riess: People spend more time looking at the bottom of the cup than the cup itself.

Bowles: Right, or the translucency, or the whole thing they're trying to identify, and sending the clay around to see if it is exactly what people said it was. That can get to be a whole other game, I think. But it's very interesting, too.

Riess: Did you start out by reading books? Is there an authority--I have looked at a number of books, and this has seemed most on target, a book by J. L. Dixon [English Porcelain of the 18th Century].[4]

Bowles: That is one of the very best. That is excellent. Yes, I think we really used that pretty much as a bible. We thought it was very good, because he makes everything quite clear, and it's understandable.

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[4] English Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century, by J.L. Dixon, Faber and Faber, London, 1952.

Design of the Bowles Gallery, and Hopes for its Future

Bowles: I have quite a collection of books about porcealin which I am going to give to the museum, because they'll have a study room. Oh, it's so exciting what they're doing! I went out the other day, I was just thrilled! Off of the porcelain gallery they're going to have a little study room. Did I tell you all this?

Riess: No. Actually I did see what I guess was the porcelain gallery, opposite the Achenbach print gallery.

Bowles: Yes. And that's a huge room with the French doors that go to the outside. And of course, what's so special about it is the natural daylight. I keep dwelling on that, but really, to see porcelain properly you really need to see it in the combination of artificial light and natural daylight.

Riess: And it's not harmed by it?

Bowles: Not harmed in the least. But they couldn't use the room for anything else, so it's just perfect.

But anyway, they're going to have a study collection in a special room right off the porcelain gallery--it will be perfect--where you can look at the books, and maybe you'll be able to take them out. They'll have tapes. And they'll have all the kind of lights that you can examine the porcelain under, and it will be a serious study room. They'll have shards, broken pieces, which show how it was made, and it's really going to be instructive.

Riess: Are you staying involved with the plans? Is it modeled on anything else? In your mind, is it like the V & A?

Bowles: No. It's going to be much better.

The latest thing we've done is taken a young man out to the museum to talk about color and background lighting, and some of those things. Not as a decorator type thing, but just to be able to talk it over with the architect. We're not going to do anything, of course, until we talk to the architect. But the architect is very sympathetic, and he's very understanding--Edward Barnes. He's well thought of, and he's a charming man. I think he'll be sympathetic about any ideas that we do have, depending on how the funds work out. But it's going to be splendid, really.

Riess: Will there be lectureships and seminars?

Bowles: Yes, there will be all sorts of things like that. There will be a lot of scholars who will be invited to come and talk, and that sort of thing. I think it will be quite exciting.

Riess: Will it be a growing collection?

Bowles: We're hoping that by giving this collection that people will add their own gifts of porcelain. It's my hope, if I am able to do it, that if I see something special I would add to it. In fact, I was just in London, I went to the ceramic fair [June 12-15, 1992]. The English are so excited about ceramics that they have a fair every year. I had never been to it, and I said to myself, "I'd better go to that, because I really want to see what it's like." And of course, I had the best time.

Riess: Tell me about it, what is it?

Bowles: It goes on for three days, and all the dealers come and bring very special things that have all been carefully vetted. It's at the Park Lane Hotel, it's a huge thing. They have various authorities speak about the porcelain, and all the top dealers in London go every year. As I say, this is the first year I've ever even been to it. So I was thrilled about that. You can imagine the interest that it must bring for that many people every year to hold this fair, and I think it must have gone on for twenty years or more. I have no idea how long it's been going on. But it's remarkable.

Riess: When you think of your collection do you think of the pieces waiting to be fleshed out by "one of these" and "one of these." Do you look at it in those ways?

Bowles: Yes, and in fact I saw a little lemon in London--I don't know whether it's been sold--and it seemed so expensive, but it seemed to rather tie in with my collection. But I didn't get it, because then I also saw another wonderful botanical plate that I was tempted by.

I have a couple of things in mind, but the trouble is today, if you wait, it's gone by the time you call the dealer. I'm very reticent about spending money foolishly, and I want to be sure. So it takes me a while.

Riess: You might think twice about the dollar these days.

Bowles: I definitely do. And I found London extremely expensive, but still wonderful. There are so many frauds today, one has to be extremely careful. I certainly wouldn't want to give anything to the museum that I thought wasn't quite right. Because anything I

buy now, well, it will probably go to the museum eventually, but I might keep it at home with some of my things and then give it, or when I die leave it to them. But anything I have now, I'm going to leave to them. I think! [laughs]

Catalogue: Blanc-de-Chine, Blind Earl

Riess: By writing the catalogue is Simon Spero saying that he finds all of these things to be--?

Bowles: My taste and Simon's are a little different. Every collector looks at things from a different point of view. Simon--I think he likes my collection a lot, but I don't think it's exactly his taste. As I said to him, I'm not too keen on blanc-de-Chine.

For me, I like things that have color. Even though they're very early and they're very interesting and all that, they don't really appeal to me very much. His taste is much more--oh, I guess I'd call it very conservative. He's pretty esoteric. I don't think I really am. I think I'm kind of a combination of--I like the color of life of everything. I like color.

Riess: You have one blanc-de-Chine piece.

Bowles: Oh, I do, and I'm getting used to it. If I can compare it, it's like when I visited Jim Hart for the first time in his house. He had so many sketches and etchings. They had never interested me. I couldn't imagine why anybody would want to have a lot of drawings. I just passed them by. And now, I see that they are very interesting. It takes some education, too. But I've been always drawn to paintings and color, and vitality with humor.

Riess: Let's look at this blanc-de-Chine piece [Chelsea 20]. Actually I see color in it.

Bowles: It does have color, yes, that's true. Blanc-de-Chine does. This is the famous "Goat and Bee" jug. Did you look at it in color? The difference is just marvelous. It's so much better in color--at least in my opinion.

Riess: Chelsea 33 I think is the one in color.

Bowles: [looking at book] These are the two Chelsea beakers I spoke about. Now, this is Henry's ho-ho bird, and that is my acanthus.

Now that I bought, and I love [Chelsea 20]. It is blanc-de-Chine, but I think it's very pretty. The "Goat and Bee" appeals to everyone. I've been able to tell my grandchildren, "You know, they used a real bee to do that." And they did.

Riess: How?

Bowles: Well, because it was in slip, they put a real bee in there, and then took it out, and of course, that fascinates people. And you can see the goat.

Riess: You're talking about Chelsea 34, and Chelsea 32.

Bowles: Yes. And that form is taken from a tea plant. I find that very interesting, because it means something to anyone. And I do see its restraint, I think it's charming.

Riess: Do you find yourself--are these very sensual for you?

Bowles: Yes, very. I think that you cannot really appreciate porcelain unless you're able to touch it. You know, it's very hard to describe soft paste. People ask me, "What does it mean?" Well, Mrs. Ashley would say, "You go like this [demonstrates] and you put the piece against your cheek. That way you feel the softness of the material."

Riess: [describing Mrs. Bowles's action] Sort of blowing out your cheek.

Bowles: Yes. And you feel the warmth of it. Well, that's a little far-fetched, but she claimed that it worked.

Riess: I could imagine what it would be to be blind, perhaps at the end of your life, and still have these pieces to touch and imagine.

Bowles: Well, that's why they always speak about the Blind Earl plate. Do you know about that?

Riess: No, I don't.

Bowles: I suddenly need a drink of water. [pause] Isn't that strange? I react in an emotional way when I see a picture of some of my pieces.

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Bowles: There was an earl who loved porcelain but who lost his eyesight, so the Blind Earl pattern was created, a beautiful rose with branches, raised from the body of the plate so he could feel it.

Riess: That is Worcester 71.

Bowles: Yes, and it's a very good example. You can see the rose and the leaves and the stem and the whole thing, and the bud. They call that the Blind Earl pattern.

Riess: Had you been looking for one of these when it was offered to you in 1974?

Bowles: We knew about it. If one came up, we thought we'd get one. I don't know that we were deliberately looking, but we had read about it and knew we would buy one someday.

Documentary Pieces

Riess: What is meant by "documentary pieces?" Dixon uses that phrase.

Bowles: Well, first there were probably only one or two of them, but also, he meant that it was a progression of years, I suppose you might say.

Riess: In his appendix under every one of the types he'll have "Important Documentary Pieces." Under Chelsea, a "Goat and Bee" jug with the word Chelsea, a triangle, and a date, would be an important documentary piece. You would be on the lookout for such things?

Bowles: Yes, definitely. Absolutely. Yes, that's very true. You don't always find them, but as it says, it shows the progression of the porcelain as it goes along. That's all I can say about it. And you try to have a piece of every one of those if you can. It's not always that easy, but you certainly do.

[looking at Dixon, p. 78] Now, [W.] Bemrose is also a very well-known author. All of these names are so important--[R.W.] Binns, and [R.L.] Hobson, and Bernard Rackham, and [W.B.] Honey--all these people are important in the history of porcelain, they're names that everyone should know.

Now, here's that same Chelsea coffee pot [Dixon, Plate 3]. They call it a chocolate pot, that is really what it is. But anyway, they've colored the tea leaves. And yet, I think it's prettier really in the blanc-de-Chine. But now, here is a documentary piece. Now, we have one of those [Dixon, Plate 2(b)], and that was very important to have, because it was so early, early.

Riess: And this is a salt cellar?

Bowles: That's a salt cellar, and that is in my catalogue there. Very important piece, yes.

And the "Girl in a Swing" family, that was a very important documentary piece [Dixon, Plate 5]. Unfortunately, I do not have a piece of "Girl in a Swing."

Riess: Are you informed about offerings by fax or phone, with a great sense of urgency?

Bowles: Not much any more. Not really, because nothing happens. I did have recently from, of all places, Australia--there was a dealer that sent out a brochure. By the time I called--there was a blue and white documentary piece, which I don't think was terribly important, but I called and it had already been sold to a San Francisco collector I know! And he collects blue and white, and I was glad he got it.

But no. We used to have people call and say, "We've got this marvelous thing," but it doesn't happen. Maybe they don't think I'm in the market any more, too. But I think they would call me if anything very exciting came up.

[tape interruption]

Riess: Where are the actual pieces now? Are they at the museum?

Bowles: They're all in crates. The museum is completely empty. They're starting to bulldoze and change everything around, so I'm not quite sure where they put them. Probably out at the deYoung or in a storage area. They're not going to be shown for a couple of years, because it's going to be a long process. And I felt I'd rather have it all come out at once, I think it would be much more dramatic. They told me that they'd display them out at the deYoung if I wanted them to, but I didn't like the idea of piecemeal. I'd like to have them all at one time.

Attribution Problems

Riess: I've made a number of notes of questions from the books I've read. In the introduction to Dixon it says that attribution problems are largely solved. I wondered, when you started collecting in the sixties, whether attribution was much less certain. Or is he referring to a time much earlier, perhaps?

Bowles: I think he's referring to a time much earlier. Attribution is another thing, as I've said before, people enjoy about English porcelain, because it's something that you can--there is room for ideas, changing all the time, and [there is still] excavation [going on] around London. I think that appeals to people. Unlike Meissen which is set and very German and you know exactly what the Germans meant when they did so-and-so or put this mark or that mark--there was no flexibility, it was just, that was the way it was, and it had to be that way, and that was the German way.

But with the different factories in England, of course there were all these possibilities and probabilities. I think that is one of the things that makes it so fascinating. It will always go on being endlessly talked about in those circles. There's never anything as definite as the German.

Riess: You collected a few pieces of Meissen. What was the reason?

Bowles: Well, I couldn't resist them, for one thing. But also, because the English were copying so many Meissen patterns that it was fun to see how closely they came to a Meissen pattern. So if you picked up one or two pieces--. It's like the Japanese, they were copying the Japanese. I have just one Japanese piece, I guess. But the color range, and the way the English were copying the Japanese and the Meissen, made it very interesting to have one or two pieces of those.

Riess: That was early in your collection anyway, 1969?

Bowles: It was quite early.

Riess: From Adele Morton, and the Japanese Kakiemon dish was in 1971 from William Lautz.

The 18th-Century English Sensibility

Riess: I want to read a quote to you--I wonder how you will relate to it, as you're a collector of 18th-century porcelain--about collecting. "The Eighteenth Century was one of those flowering times in our all too sordid history when by some lucky chance conditions seemed to be right to perfect the illusion that with a little effort men might live gay, free and full lives." [Dixon, p. 2] Does that resonate for you?

Bowles: That's very nice, yes. And I think that that was what appealed to us, because after all, porcelain, the taste in porcelain

represents the kind of people these were. Their taste was so--I don't know whether I like the word "refined," but so free and charming, that I would have loved to have known them.

I mean, anyone that--they didn't overdo the gold decoration, they didn't overdo anything, they had wonderful restraint. And at the same time, not too set, like the Germans. It just must have been a wonderful time in England. They loved nature, and they represented nature in the porcelain. It was just so free. I think that appealed to me, the connection between a garden and porcelain.

And also the fact, being a fairly practical soul--at least I like to think of myself as being practical--it was very useful. They could really use it--the blue and white, the Worcester. Not the more elaborate Chelsea. But they had a great sense of appreciation, which of course they had in the furniture, in everything in England in the 18th century. It was quite a period. I think that in many ways Henry was Georgian, and we both admired the 18th-century way of life. Shooting and fishing were a fine art and not just a sport.

Riess: A porcelain painter, O'Neale for instance, did he reflect what people wanted, or was he an innovator who directed taste?

Bowles: I think he painted what people wanted, and he had this incredible talent. He was an Irishman, of all things, and I guess they all drank just excessively. That was a serious problem. How he painted those wonderful delicate things he did I don't know. But no, I think that he knew what people wanted but was talented as well. He emphasized a subtle humor.

Riess: Because it was a market? It was not an art form?

Bowles: I think it was a combination. I don't think they were using huge sets of O'Neale tea ware. No one's quite sure of that. But I think that O'Neale things were so special that they didn't really have great quantities of them.

Riess: I'll go on with my quotes. A fine lady, according to Garrick, the playwright "lies in bed all morning, rattles about all day; and sits up all night; she goes everywhere and sees everything, knows everybody and loves nobody; ridicules her friends, coquets with her lovers; sets 'em together by the ears, tells fibs, makes mischief, buys china, cheats at cards, keeps a pet dog and hates parsons." [laughter]

Bowles: I love it! Oh, I think that is marvelous! [laughter] I'm afraid it doesn't apply to me, but--I suppose they did collect, you know?

Maybe that was a pastime for the English women, that could have been, to fill a china cabinet with things.

Riess: Sounds like the most serious thing that she does in a long dissolute day.

Bowles: That really is marvelous.

Riess: The 18th-century porcelain is considered to be rococo, in spirit anyway.

Bowles: I think in spirit, but very refined and lighthearted.

Riess: He writes of the rococo period, "For rococo art nothing was too fantastic...movement...wit...impudence. Porcelain is the very stuff of this art." And by the end of the century it was "imprisoned in the formal shapes of the Neo-classical style"--this period you were not collecting.

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: --"it began to look a little sad and never in fact recovered the exquisite rose-in-bud loveliness that was given to it by an age in which conscious refinement of taste and a carefree joy of life walked hand in hand."

Bowles: That's very nicely said. I think that's very good, because later, the Gold Anchor period, I thought it ugly. We deliberately have no Gold Anchor, because it became very elaborate and gilded and overdone. I suppose it was popular at one time, but I notice when I get my catalogues now from Christie's, all the Gold Anchor is being sold. I guess because my taste is not that taste I think it's truly overdone.

Riess: Did you write the descriptions in these two books? Sometimes two lines, sometimes five lines of description, is that yours?

Bowles: Yes.

Documentation, and Curating

Riess: The process of documenting, how did you get serious about this?

Bowles: Well, every time we'd buy a piece we'd measure it, study it, really incorporate it into our lives. Then we'd have the secretary at the office type it up or whatever, but everything to

do with it we kept because it was just sort of interesting. We really were seriously collecting. It was not just something that might have been fun, we really were very serious, without really knowing what we were going to do, but dreaming of what we might do.

I have a letter that Henry wrote to the museum about our hopes. [5]

Now, of course, the next thing I would love to do, if I could ever afford it, would be to have a curator of porcelain at the museum. That may be just way out of line, but certainly we're making one big step now, having this porcelain gallery. It's an ultimate dream come true, and that's rewarding and pretty exciting.

Riess: Is there a curator of porcelain at Seattle?

Bowles: Yes, there is, and she's a very nice woman who has discovered that one of her pieces is not quite authentic! She's a very enthusiastic, attractive person.

After Graham Keith we had a splendid man here, Michael Conforti, who was hired away by the Milwaukee Art Museum. He's still there, and he's just a marvelous person. He's very knowledgeable about porcelain, and enthusiastic. I'd love to have someone like that. Early on when we were first there Graham Keith was the curator of decorative arts, but very interested in porcelain. It made it wonderful to have someone like that.

Right now, there's a nice person, Lee Miller, but she has to do about fifty other things, so she's not really strictly porcelain, and it would be awfully nice to have someone like Graham. We hope down the line that that could happen, but the way life is changing, I don't know. It's hard to see that happening.

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[5] "We believe that our collection would be an important part of a general porcelain assemblage which could be enjoyed by scholars and others specifically interested in the subject. Properly housed and displayed, our collection plus the Museum's present holdings would form the nucleus of an important collection which I feel would encourage additional gifts." Letter from Henry Bowles to Ian White, Director of the Fine Arts Museums, July 7, 1977.

Hans Weinberg, Auctions

Riess: How did you make your first purchases from Sotheby's and Christie's, and Parke-Bernet?

Bowles: Oh, at first we bought a couple of pieces ourselves, and it was risky. We realized that if we were really going to be spending money we should have a dealer look at the pieces, because if you weren't in London it was hard to tell, they didn't tell you what the condition was. They'd give you a description, but they didn't tell you whether there were chips or fire cracks or repairs.

So Mr. [Hans] Weinberg would look at the things at auction, at Christie's and Sotheby's, and then let us know the condition. [Hans Weinberg was the proprietor of Antique Porcelain Co. on 57th St., New York, and the Bowleses first purchase from him was in 1968.] He was marvelous at describing a piece, and letting us know whether he thought it was good and worth going after. We realized we needed someone with more expertise than we had. To be so far away was impossible, and we couldn't be in London all the time. He did the bidding for us, and that was lots of fun, and very exciting when he'd call back to say what he'd bought--and what he hadn't lost at auction. Many times we missed pieces because our bid wasn't high enough.

He also told us that if he really loved a piece he would buy it for his shop. If we decided then afterwards, for 10 or 20 percent more we could buy it from him and his shop. So that made it nice. But it also meant that if we really wanted something, that we would go farther than we had anticipated to get him to buy it at auction for us.

Riess: You gave him a limit?

Bowles: Yes, we did, we gave him a monetary limit. And if he'd go over the limit he'd call and he'd say, "Oh, are you sure you don't want it?" I only remember once or twice that it really happened that we didn't want it. Mostly, we were pretty thrilled.

If we didn't want to buy it, which was seldom, but once in a while we thought it was too much, or we thought it might go for too high a price, he'd say, "All right. I'm going to get it, and then if you want it, it will be in the shop and you can pay 10 percent more and buy it from me."

That might have been a come-on, it might have been a racket, I don't know. But we felt that he was being quite honest with us. Maybe we were wrong, but I don't think so. And it's proven that

we haven't been. We were taking a little bit of a risk. But I believed him, that he bought for his shop as well, so that he wasn't disappointed if we said, "Well, that was way more than we thought we wanted to spend."

Riess: But you've bid and bought at auctions yourself?

Bowles: Yes, I have, and that's exciting, but we didn't do really much of that personally, we had him do it for us. It was just too hard to be in London in the season when there was fishing or shooting to be done, or other things in our lives.

Also, it takes a great deal of time. You have to plan to be there for two weeks or something like that, just sit there at an auction--it's not that exciting. It's better to have somebody do it for you, and particularly a professional. If you get excited, you might bid on something that you really didn't want, and you'd get carried away. I think we both felt it was better if we weren't there.

We'd also had a rather unfortunate experience with a stamp auction, if you want to hear about that. When Henry was collecting American stamps--U.S. stamps--we went to an auction at the Waldorf-Astoria. Henry knew exactly the stamp he wanted, because he had the whole list. We bid on it and the hammer went down, the man said, "You have it," and suddenly in the back of the room some man got up and contested. They opened the bidding and the other man was able to buy it.

I said to somebody later, "I never heard of such a thing! Once it's closed and the hammer is down, I didn't know you could do that!" But they said, "Oh, with a stamp auction, you can. No other kind of an auction you can do that, but with a stamp auction you can." So we had a lesson out of that. We said, "We're never going to try to do that with porcelain. We're just better off if we don't go, just let Mr. Weinberg bid and that will be that." [laughs] I think we were absolutely right.

Riess: It was a kind of a safety net to keep one step removed.

Bowles: I think it really was.

Riess: When you go to the auction, when you're there for the two weeks, are you allowed to handle the pieces?

Bowles: Yes. You are. You're allowed to go in and handle them, but you know that's hard. You go in and you have a few minutes, you look at it, and it's just--there's so much more to know. We felt we were better off having him do it. We just didn't want to spend

that sort of time really, because there were so many other things we really liked to do. To sort of be nitpicking over whether it was this or that or the other was just too time-consuming.

Riess: When you handle a piece you want, do you feel an instant, passionate connection with it, or is it more intellectual?

Bowles: It's intellectual, yes, as well as passionate. It really is. So much connects to your emotions and your intellect that it's easy to be carried away with something that's beautiful, and isn't the right color paste, and the translucency isn't right--I mean, there is just a lot to it. To go into an auction--and the way they have them, they throw the things around. They have them in cases, but the man's standing there with the keys jangling, and you want to take a look, and everybody's pushing, and it's nerve-wracking, it's not an easy thing to do at all. You really need an expert, someone that's used to doing that.

Mr. Weinberg--I'm sure a lot of it was flamboyance on his part, but he claimed that he'd go in and he'd sort of frighten people because he was doing the bidding. I think he was very clever at it. A lot of people said he paid too much, I don't know. But we were always very pleased with him and his purchases for us. In fact, a huge part of our lives with our collection was gone when he died.

Riess: When did you first connect with him?

Bowles: The first year we started to bid at auction we bought without a dealer. Then it must have been the following year that we had him buying for us at auction, because we had one experience and decided that it was a little disappointing, so that we'd rather have someone that really knew what he was doing.

The Fascination, and the Pleasures of Collecting

Riess: I'm curious about how competitive you feel you are. [laughs] And how much you were in the grips of all of this. And did you and Henry disagree about pieces?

Bowles: Very seldom. It's amazing. Our tastes were so similar, it was remarkable. And as I've said before, once or twice he would like something simply because it was rare, and if I didn't really appreciate it, I would disagree. But we just had a very good rapport about it.

I should think it would be very hard to collect with anyone that didn't more or less agree with you, because it would be almost impossible. And anything I wanted he'd buy, which was fun. And anything he wanted, he bought anyway. [laughs] It was marvelous. There was never any--you know, great feeling of restraint, although we didn't just spend outlandishly.

I think we were awfully fortunate to be able to do that, and I had--many people have said to me, "Oh, I just wish that I had had an interest like that that would have taken me all over the world, to different museums, to different cities." It has been just an inspiration, really. There's always something for me to see in any city. There's always a place of interest, and new adventure.

In fact, we were just in Copenhagen, and I said to Julian [Peabody], "Oh, look, there's a museum of decorative arts." I thought it would all be modern, but we walked in there, and if you would believe it--I'm just thinking of it now--it was incredible! There was no one in it, for example. But when we got to the 18th-century porcelain, they had English, they had everything! It was an unbelievable collection. Apparently the money had come from the Carlsberg beer people. It is just acres of the most interesting porcelain you could imagine, and it was an education to be there, it made my day, I was there for two hours.

Poor Julian, dragging him around, but I think he enjoyed it too. For me, it has been such a leading drive in my life, and I have come across places that no one had told me about, and there they were! And it was just remarkable. It's been a great interest.

Riess: When you're in any capital city of the world, is it a treasure hunt? Do you always seek out dealers?

Bowles: I don't seek out dealers so much, because that takes so much time, but I certainly seek out the museums, and I've been so fortunate. I found one in Zurich--. It's an odd thing, too, nobody ever tells you about porcelain museums, or porcelain in museums, because it's such an unusual interest, I suppose. The palace in Zurich was magnificent--full of Meissen, but I can enjoy the atmosphere.

Riess: Often the porcelain is displayed in a hall on the way to something else.

Bowles: Exactly, exactly. That's very true. It's not as though you could--if you were interested in Picasso, for instance, you'd know

all the museums you could go to to see Picasso. Of course, that makes it even more fun.

The museum I found in Zurich was in an old palace, and beautiful. It was the unexpectedness of it that makes it fun. It's the feeling that you're discovering, and that no one has told you, "This is something you should be sure and see, like the French Impressionists show." It's always the sense of adventure, the sense of finding. I think that's what I really like about it.

But it's also nothing you can tell anyone about. People have often said to me, "Couldn't I go with you when you go wherever you go? So I can see some of the things you see?" [laughs] Well, there's no way to really get anyone else to see, and it's something so personal, you just don't need anyone along. I think it takes away from the excitement of it, really, because you're discovering all the time as you're moving along. It's not anywhere you can take anyone. It's mostly something you do on your own, and someone is just a nuisance when they're along with you, because they're holding you back and talking to you. I like people, but they do hold you back from thinking clearly.

Riess: That's interesting. I'm not sure what you're saying. Let's say you had had a couple of hours alone. How would your experience of being at that Copenhagen museum have been different?

Bowles: For me, it's important to be able to share my interest, but also--in London at the ceramic fair Julian got a little tired. If I had been alone I might have stayed longer. And I did go back several times, just to be alone, just to think, and to look, and to talk to the various dealers. Or not even talk, just to be there. I can spend hours, hours, doing that. But I don't have hours, so I spend as many hours as I can.

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Riess: You describe enjoying time to just think about the porcelain. It is hard for me, and maybe for people who will approach this for the first time, to understand what kinds of things you might quietly be thinking about? Can you talk about that?

Bowles: I wonder if I can. Well, I guess I always think about the kind of people they were, these 18th-century people. I can't help but feel that I would love to have known them. I admire them, I admire their taste. I guess that's it. I'm kind of transported to another little world somewhere. I guess that's the feeling I really have.

It's something very precious for me, because there's so much I don't know, but the fact that I do know something fairly well, I like that feeling. There are so many things that I'm interested in but I don't have the time, or I don't know enough about them. This porcelain collecting, I feel as though it's my subject, and I like that feeling.

And when I go with groups from the museum, they know how I am, so they'll always say, "Oh, there's some porcelain, Connie, what does that mean?" I'm baffled sometimes, because I don't know quite what it is. But I like the feeling that people think, "Well, at least she knows something." [laughs] And that's kind of nice. Jim used to say I was his porcelain expert. Sometimes that can fail you, too, but it's a nice thing to think you know something about anything.

Riess: Have you taken a leadership role in the local ceramic circle?

Bowles: I've tried to, but it's hard. I'm on the board, and I try to go to the meetings, but I'm not a meeting person. I don't really like to go to meetings so I try to avoid them whenever I can, and I do it rather successfully! [laughs] I'm not that sort of a person. I don't like being organized very much. I'm very much of a free spirit--fortunately or unfortunately. And I guess that anything that's too organized, I don't like it very much. So I find I don't attend.

Riess: Well, it sounds like you have partly defined this as your private life, porcelain collecting.

Bowles: I think that's right, I think it is. A very private thing. And it happened a long time ago, when I was really quite young, I think. I've always liked--I love people, as you know, but I like the security too that it gives me to know that I carry around some knowledge. I like that, just as I like to fish.

I've been introducing Julian to fly-fishing, and the other day I went out and took a couple of lessons with him. The man said, "You're so good, you don't need any lessons." Well, I was so thrilled, of course, I was impossible! I feel as though that is a world that I do understand, and of course I could be a <u>better</u> fly fisherman--I mean, of course [I could use a lesson]--but I'm remarkably good for a woman, I guess!

If there are a couple of things that give you confidence, that you know you do well, it's a pretty nice feeling. I guess that's what I'm saying about the porcelain. But again, there's a whole world out there that I don't know, of things that I should know.

More on San Francisco Porcelain Sources in 1967

Riess: Did Henry come with porcelain pieces from his family, from the Miller or Bowles estate?

Bowles: Absolutely nothing, nothing. Neither one of us came with a thing. I mean, we came with all kinds of possessions and so forth, but as far as the porcelain goes, there was nothing. And his mother--no, it was just something that--. That's another thing, it was just so entirely ours. That made it special, too, because lots of people I think do start with their parents' collection. But we didn't.

I'm sure that we came from backgrounds that gave us the idea to take an interest. I think that you can never say that that wasn't important, because that was very important. You had to have the background to even be interested in something like that. I feel that they deserve a great deal of credit on both sides for introducing us to that kind of a world where art and music are important. But as far as any pieces, I don't think there were any. I know there were none. There were just none.

Riess: Was Gump's a place to find pieces?

Bowles: No. There was nothing.

Riess: What about the San Francisco auction houses? Butterfield's?

Bowles: Butterfield's in those days was really a very second-class place compared to Parke-Bernet in New York, or Christie's and Sotheby's in London. It was just old furniture; people died and they sent their furniture down to Butterfield's. It was nothing. It has come up tremendously lately with Mr. [Bernard] Osher. He has a lot of knowledge and taste. It's still pretty marginal, but it's certainly far better than it ever was.

They do occasionally--they had an auction fairly recently, in fact, that amused me. There were two people sent over from London to buy porcelain. This [the estate] was some woman whom I had known who belonged to a ceramic circle and died, and her son wasn't interested, so they auctioned the things off. I think it did fairly well.

I was surprised. I thought, "This is a reverse situation, sending somebody over from London!" That's how desperate they are

for pieces. They just don't have any, there's just very little around.

Riess: Was it a collection that was comparable to yours?

Bowles: No! But it was an interesting collection. The woman was very knowledgeable.

Riess: Who is this?

Bowles: This is a woman called Ruby Brown. She was a delightful old lady that had studied and bought little pieces here and there, and done very well with it. I would like to have had her over more, but my life got too busy, I just didn't do it.

Riess: One of the dealers was Ruby Cook. Is it the same Ruby?

Bowles: No. There was a Ruby Cook, that's right, yes, she was in Sausalito. And she was an interesting woman. She originally--as many of these dealers do, they start out collecting, and then they didn't know what to do with it, or needed the money, they sold it. That's what happens sometimes. In fact, Mr. Weinberg, I guess I told you, at one time wanted Henry to start a shop in San Francisco, and Henry said, "Absolutely not!" I mean, that would be out of the question.

Literature and Life of the 18th Century

Riess: You said earlier that you loved thinking about what it might have been like to live in the 18th century.

Bowles: Yes, then I could have seen how they lived with it. There are still questions in my mind of how they did live. Tea was a very expensive thing, too, so all those little teapots that you see were due to the fact that the tea was so expensive. They were tiny teapots.

That was another thing I always thought fascinating to collect. There was an Englishman, Frank Tilley, who made an historical survey, "The Why of the Teapot," in a catalogue. It was charming, all these documentary teapots from the Chinese to the Dutch to the English.

Riess: Have you enjoyed reading 18th-century literature to flesh out your visual experience?

Bowles: I should more than I do, but I've always enjoyed reading, and so I have read--I love, for instance, Jane Austen--I love all those things. I can read them forever. I love Dickens. I just enjoy that sort of thing, I really do.

Riess: I wondered if 18th-century writers would describe the household china in a way so that you might even recognize a table set with a pattern. Have collectors managed to find connections?

Bowles: A man in Williamsburg, John Austin, has done that, because in the palace at Williamsburg they have some very nice Chelsea. Of course, the English were in Williamsburg. They were the elite of our Eastern Seaboard. They brought pieces over with them. I think he's made a few connections.

Riess: In easel paintings you must certainly see authentic china pieces.

Bowles: Yes, which brings me to another thought: a lot of those women they talk about, 18th-century women, attempted porcelain painting. It was a hobby. Down through the Victorian period, when women were doing absolutely nothing, they were painting porcelain, and that was a great thing to do. I do remember Henry telling me about his grandmother, and showing me a bowl that was in the bathroom that was used as a hand-bowl, that she had painted the flowers around the inside of it.

Riess: In one of the many wonderful still life paintings of the 18th century wouldn't you see a table set with perhaps a "Goat and Bee" pitcher?

Bowles: You might, and in fact in Bath, when I was there, there was a painting of an 18th-century lady holding a teacup and saucer that I could have sworn was Worcester. I would love to know where that painting is exactly, because it was just a reproduction. Oh, you could just spend the rest of your life doing these things!

Riess: You could go to graduate school!

Bowles: [laughs] I would love to do that. Actually, I really would. I was thinking of going to Mills College and taking a course there in September.

Riess: And writing up some of this, really pursuing this.

Bowles: I really would like to do that. Would it be better to take a course in 18th-century English literature? That probably would be the best thing to do.

Other Collectors

Riess: Are there Japanese or wealthy Arabs who are competing now, active collectors of 18th-century English porcelain?

Bowles: I don't think the Japanese are even vaguely interested. I don't think they even know it exists, at least that's my impression. I don't think they ever were interested in that field at all. It's just not a thing of general appeal. English porcelain is a relatively narrow field.

Riess: Do you have friends in San Francisco who are at the level of collecting that you are?

Bowles: No. [thinks] I know people who have one or two pieces, not even many of those. But there are a lot of people who collect paintings and other things.

Riess: [laughs] Sounds to me like a guarded reply!

Bowles: I was at Diana Knowles's one time--I'm sure you know who she is, Diana Dollar Knowles. Her house is like a huge hotel, it's the most elaborate thing you've ever known. And she's very nice, really.

I saw a Longton Hall dish there, and I picked it up--because you know, they copy them so well that you're never sure--I picked it up, and it looked as though it was really very authentic. I said to her, "Do you know that this is Longton Hall, Diana?" She said, "No, I don't. But it certainly ought to be something, for what I paid for it." [laughter] I thought that was a good answer.

I'm sure some decorator purchased it for her. That's the only person I know that has a piece of Longton Hall. And I think it is truly Longton Hall. I'm not--she didn't allow me to hold it up to the light so I could see the translucency. Actually, Dodie Rosekrans has a few blanc-de-Chine pieces, and she is interested.

HENRY M. BOWLES
3365 WELLS FARGO BUILDING
44 MONTGOMERY STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94104

July 7, 1977

Mr. Ian McK. White, Director
S. F. Fine Arts Museum
Golden Gate Park
San Francisco, CA 94118

Dear Ian:

I'm glad that you wrote me about the porcelain. Constance and I have been meaning to do something about this for some time. We are off to Iceland tomorrow and will be back about July 21st and will try to get together with you shortly thereafter.

Earlier this year, and at considerable expense, we had Miss R. L. U. Weinberg of the Antique Porcelain Company of New York and London come out here and up-date our appraisal. She presently values the collection in excess of $550,000. We are continuing to add to it.

I shall try to give you a few ideas relative to the disposal of the collection which are important to us.

We would not like our porcelain to be used for casual decoration of period rooms or other decorative purposes.

We believe that our collection would be an important part of a general porcelain assemblage which could be enjoyed by scholars and others specifically interested in the subject. Properly housed and displayed our collection plus the Museums' present holdings would form the nucleus of an important collection which I feel would encourage additional gifts.

The Legion's Porcelain Room is a superb facility for its designated purpose; however, it has always been a disappointment because of its boring unchanging display of inferior material.

When the time comes to part with our collection, we might (and I stress the word "might") do the following:

1. Donate the collection over a period of time to suit our tax situation. The entire collection (minus possibly a few pieces) to be placed with the Museum, partially "on loan" until the donations are completed. The only

strings attached would be that our collection would be used mainly as part of a major porcelain display rather than for decorative purposes.

2. Redecorate the Porcelain Room including repainting, improved cabinet lighting if needed, drapes, etc.

3. Set up a fund to provide for the services of a part-time curator to mount the porcelain initially, and subsequently to maintain a program of rotation in order to provide vitality and interest in the displays.

4. Ultimately we would hope to set up another fund, the income from which could be used to add to the Museums' holdings in ceramics.

5. Once we find a "home" for our collection, our inclination will probably be to continue collecting with an objective of broadening areas when a museum's total holdings are weak.

Now, Ian, don't get your hopes up prematurely. I have no idea when we shall be willing to donate our porcelain. A lot depends on when we decide to sell our house on Jackson Street and move to something smaller, and we have no present plans. We do, however, think it timely to look now toward the ultimate disposal of the collection. A number of museums are interested, but we hope it can stay in San Francisco.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Henry M. Bowles

HMB:gc

V THE BOWLES PORCELAIN COLLECTION

[Interview 4: October 21, 1992] ##

First Pieces of Blue and White

Bowles: The first pieces that I bought were blue and white, and I guess I told you, I saw them in a shop. [looking at Worcester 5] This exactly is it. I thought, "I would just love to have that." The woman that was my saleslady was very knowledgeable. She started in telling me about Worcester and what the hatch crescent mark meant, and why the cup was a copy of Meissen, and about soft-paste. She went on and on and I was absolutely intrigued. And I spent $25 for that.

Riess: Was that Adele Morton?

Bowles: No, it was a saleslady in her shop, a great friend of hers, a delightful older woman. I'd hardly call her a saleslady, she was so knowledgeable and so charming. And it just absolutely caught my imagination.

So anyway, I went running home and told Henry, and he said, "Well, go back and get a couple of other pieces." He came with me, and we bought this [Worcester 2], we bought three of those, which are called the acorn pattern, and you can see the acorn in there. It doesn't seem to say on this description, but they are the acorn pattern, and they're blue and white.

Riess: And you escalated your investment.

Bowles: Oh, yes, to $375.

Riess: Is that the difference between you and Henry?

Bowles: Yes, there's a huge difference, and I think it'a true of men generally. They're always, if they want something, including a woman, they're ready to do anything for it. [laughs] That's just a little aside. But most men are inclined, if they want something, just to go ahead and buy it, and then worry about paying for it later. At least that's my experience.

Riess: You were buying perfect pieces then.

Bowles: Well, a pair of Bow platters come to my mind that she [Morton] had that were fascinating--I used to keep them on a coffee table--and I remember distinctly, we paid $80 for those, and I was aghast, I thought that was just wildly extravagant. And they did have a couple of chips in them, but they were fascinating because the underside of them had--I guess you'd call them imitation Chinese marks, which happens very frequently in porcelain, but a lot of people don't know about it. So that caught my imagination.

It also had a little kind of a tape [on which] someone had written, "From the Allen Collection." I just thought that was so romantic. Imagine! I bought a piece from some well-known collection! The whole thing really inspired me, I guess you'd call it.

There they are, right there. [looking at Bow] They really were just so stunning. They call that the dark powder-blue background. According to [what I have read], the Chinese did that, and so the English tried to copy them, and they would blow the powder through a straw, and that is why when you look at it it's a little bit mottled. It isn't totally solid blue, it's got a lot of variations in it. But it was quite a technique to do that, it was very difficult.

They'd keep the reserves in white. They did the background first. Sometimes you find pieces that don't have any design in them because they didn't get around to putting the designs in the reserves. But that was quite an elaborate technique to do that.

Riess: Are these techniques still used?

Bowles: No, no. These people were working with all kinds of things with lead in them, all the glazes and everything, and the paints. And none of them lived much beyond about forty, I think. [laughs] But no, I don't think they do anything like that today.

Riess: But it was the blue and white that drew your attention first?

Bowles: Yes, and I still love blue and white. I think it's very pretty. I thought I'd never like anything any better. But then when I

began to see some colored things, and I love color, I realized that, well, that was outstanding! [laughs]

Saturday Mornings with Rea Ashley

Riess: Once Henry had endorsed the idea of doing it, you were the scout?

Bowles: Oh, absolutely. And I have spent a lifetime being that kind of a scout, which is a very bad fault, I'm sure, but I've had a lot of fun.

But yes, Henry was very interested, and on Saturday mornings we'd regularly go down to Mrs. Ashley, and sit around and talk and maybe buy one or two pieces. Never anything very expensive, that came quite a bit later, we worked up to that. When we started to buy really expensive pieces, that was much later, because we were perfectly happy with the little things we bought.

Then we'd come back here with what we had purchases and measure them and look at them and put them in the catalogue, the beginning catalogue. Henry derived a great deal of fun out of doing that, because he was very exacting and he adored measuring things, and describing them in detail. That kind of thing I would probably never have done, or I might have done a little bit of it, but that really fascinated him.

Riess: Documentation.

Bowles: Documentation, yes. He'd been a stamp collector, he'd been a book collector, and he'd always enjoyed sort of cataloguing. That's why I have to have somebody else do the catalogue now because I'd never be up to it.

Riess: Did it replace his interest in stamp and book collecting?

Bowles: Pretty much. Never in the books, because we both loved that, and I still collect books, and he did for a long time, too. But it replaced the stamps a little bit, yes, because we got more expensive. I guess that was why. And also, I think he just thought it was more fun to collect together, and I think that did make it a lot more fun. It was a very special relationship.

Riess: Do you have a library of books on 18th-century English porcelain? Is that how you knew what to look for?

Bowles: Yes, we did, and also we had seen auction catalogues in Sotheby's and Christie's, and we knew the way they described things, and so we were following that. Interestingly enough--I just remembered this--when we first started getting catalogues on porcelain, and they had some wonderful ones in those days, they would never have to describe condition. With stamps or books, as you know, they always have to describe condition. So you had no way of knowing whether this thing had a big crack in it or anything. The auction house simply didn't have to say, as they do today.

Riess: I wonder why that was.

Bowles: I just don't know. I think maybe there was so little interest that it didn't matter much. And maybe those early pieces were fairly perfect, and it was only as things became more scarce that they had to begin to describe a huge crack, or a chip. I guess that was the reason. People had been collecting stamps for years, and it's such a narrow field. Again, porcelain is a pretty narrow thing to collect. I think that might have been the reason, though I'm not quite sure.

"Feminine Flavor," Useful Pieces

Riess: I would like to read a quote to you about another collection, the Bowes Collection. Josephine Bowes's "...taste for the small-scale, good quality items (combined with her refusal to spend large sums of money!), was predominant, and gives the collections a special feminine flavour, which contrasts with many of the grander museums formed with government money." [The International Ceramics Fair and Seminar, London 1992, p. 17]

Bowles: That's interesting.

Riess: Do you agree that china collecting has a feminine flavor?

Bowles: I think to many men it was sort of a shocking thing for Henry to be doing, but he was not the kind of person that cared what anyone really thought. That's the way he was. But I think there are very few men that are interested. Although I find it's doctors and dentists, and the oddest kind of men, who collect porcelain. And they're completely captivated by it. They really find the study fascinating.

But that kind of a man--well, you have to worry about them, I suppose, a man who thought he might be considered feminine, you can't be bothered with people like that. [laughs] I feel that.

Don't you? If I had to do it just because of what someone thought, I'd never do anything.

Riess: "The origins of this taste for collecting 18th-century objects of domestic origin are difficult to trace. There must always have been a certain amount of interest in good quality ceramics from the immediate past which were not in a fashionable style, otherwise all these items would not have been preserved for us at all." [p. 17]

That's something else to think about. The fact that any of it lasts at all means that there has been loving attention paid, it hasn't just been put into the attics. Have the things that you and Henry bought for the most part come from broken-up collections?

Bowles: I would say that generally a lot of the Worcester would have come from a larger collection, because Worcester was more commonplace and it was more available for people, and there was more of it. So yes, and that intrigued us, too, the idea that these were useful pieces. That's why we did not buy any figurines, because I have always had a horror of people that had cabinets full of figurines, and I thought, "That's the last thing I want!"

The idea that these Worcester pieces represented in a way the people that were using them was very appealing to us. Then as we became a little bit more sophisticated, I guess you'd call it, we started buying Chelsea, which I don't think was ever really intended for use. There was never a whole set, for instance, of Hans Sloane plates ever. And they were done for the very well-to-do, even in the 18th century.

Riess: As display pieces?

Bowles: Yes, as display pieces. Because they were botanically interesting. And the English, I think, seemed to me they were not at the point where they were trying to impress their friends with pieces of porcelain. They really just genuinely loved them. That was the feeling that we had in collecting those kinds of things.

Later on, it all changed, and they were doing more opulent things and more things that you could put on the mantlepiece, sort of showy.

Riess: In this catalogue from the Ceramics Fair are a number of pictures of porcelain rooms in Dresden. I don't know whether the English ever had that, but the Germans did.

Bowles: Oh, the Germans were porcelain lovers. I've never been to Dresden, I'd like to do that sometime. And of course, I do think Meissen is magnificent. Again, I say the charm of the Chelsea was that they were trying to copy the Germans, but the fact that they didn't succeed and were simpler and had used their own imagination made all the charm right there. That's the whole secret of the thing, it just has to appeal to people.

Adding to the Hans Sloanes

Bowles: I have ordered a plate from London. I feel so naughty! I saw it last year when I was there, and the woman said, "I'll let you know if anyone buys it," and then I thought, "What if somebody does buy that?" So I called her yesterday and I said, "I can't stand it any longer. I'm buying it." It's a Hans Sloane plate with a beautiful, simple flower and a butterfly, and I have a transparency of it upstairs. I'm so excited about it coming, I can't wait.

Riess: And you'll live with it for a while?

Bowles: Oh, I'm not going to give it to the museum, because now that they say they might not open until 1995, I'm keeping the things that I have here. And incidentally, I want to show those to you while you're here. I'd like to have you see them, because you'd get the feeling of it maybe a little more than just talking about it.

Riess: This Ceramics Fair catalogue shows some Chelsea pieces for sale, some rather extraordinary pieces.

Bowles: Yes. I think that is one of the most interesting things, because they call that a Scolopendrium. [p. 55] I thought that was the most exotic word I'd ever heard. It's sort of modern, and it's amazing, it's remarkable.

Now, this [p. 59, "large Chelsea dish painted with an especially fine example of 'Hans Sloane' type decoration"] is very similar to what I've bought. At the antique fair they may have had that one, but it wasn't perfect. And you know, at this point I don't like to buy anything that isn't really perfect.

Now that [p. 62] is just charming. But you see that replacement on the spout? It was broken, and they just put that little replacement there. And, of course, the acanthus-leaf, which is such a beautiful, simple design, just charming. [reading:] "Chelsea white acanthus-leaf globular teapot and cover

with stylised bamboo handle, the overlapping crisply moulded leaves forming the body and cover." That's very early incised triangle.

Rous Lench Collection

Bowles: There's the collection that came from the Rous Lench Collection. Oh! That's a whole other story.

Riess: What is that story?

Bowles: Well, when we went to Worcester, the man who was director of the museum, very much of an authority and very well-known [John Sandon], he said, "While you're here you really ought to go see the Rous Lench Collection"--which is what this is. We said, "Well, how do we get in?" He said, "I'll arrange it."

He [Rous Lench] lived quite near the Worcester Museum, and we went over. We were told that he was a bit of an eccentric, and I'll never forget it, I could not believe it! We walked in, and it was just a mess of everything--cobwebs, it hadn't been cleaned in I don't know how long--and here was this funny old man over in a chair kind of talking to himself, and muttering, and all of a sudden a mouse ran across the floor! I was just hysterical, it was so dirty.

He sort of went, "Humph"--he was spitting into an old bucket or something, it was just awful--and he said, "I did hear about you, you can look around." We did look around, and in the cabinets, and he had some lovely things.

The story was that his father had been a tailor and been extremely successful, and made a great deal of money. This man had started buying--. I guess all porcelain people are eccentrics, because he certainly was. But he had been buying, and when he died I guess it was mostly auctioned off, and maybe to the benefit of the Worcester Museum, I'm not quite sure how that story went. But anyway, I can see that whole place right now. It was so terrible! [laughs]

Riess: And when was that?

Bowles: I think it would have been the seventies.

Riess: Well, you were in league with some interesting folks.

Bowles: Oh, absolutely.

Discussing Pieces in 1992 London Ceramics Fair Catalogue

Bowles: It was interesting that you turned these [pages of the catalogue] down. Now, that is a beauty [p. 78], that is really nice. (Oh, now here is [an advertisement by] the girl I bought it from, Robyn Robb.) I have a plate that is very similar that they claim was done by an Irishman called O'Neale, and I think it probably was.

These plates--it's a silver shape, copied after a silver dish, and the painting itself was usually done by O'Neale, because he was so good at these wonderful kinds of scenes. It's often a fable. This one isn't, but they were often fable designs.

Riess: I remember reading that you could tell something about early and late O'Neale by the birds and the sky and the kinds of clouds.

Bowles: Well, there are all kinds of theories like that, but frankly, I think you can overdo some of those things. Now, here's Simon Spero [p. 83], and he's the man that's doing our catalogue. I have bought very little from him, and yet he's such a wonderful authority.

I don't know this place at all [Steppes Hill Farm Antiques, p. 84], but that's a fine pair of Chelsea red anchor beakers and stands. That's another thing: it's very important--with most pieces you can't always have them--but having the stand with a cup or with a tureen is very important, if they have them.

Riess: The beaker shape, what was that used for? Is it just a handle-less cup, or what is a beaker?

Bowles: A beaker is usually higher than a cup, and I would have thought ordinarily a beaker would have a little pointed place to pour out of.

Riess: So it is for pouring rather than drinking from?

Bowles: Yes, I would think so, and I don't know whether it was even for any kind of use. Maybe they just liked the idea of the shape of it. The two beakers that I have that are Chelsea, I don't think they were ever used for anything, because they don't look as though thy were, and no one's ever said they were.

Riess: These are the two beakers that you and Henry discussed.

Bowles: Discussed at length, right. And discussed constantly. [laughing]

Manufactories

Bowles: One of the things that's hard is not to have someone to talk to about this, although Julian's [Julian Peabody, CCB's husband] been darling. The trouble is, he has read a few books and he asks me questions that I don't have the answers for, and I say, "Please don't ask me that!" [laughs]

Riess: What kind of books has he read?

Bowles: He's picked up some porcelain books, and he's been reading them, and then he asks me, as I say, these outrageous questions that I can't possibly answer, because he's a lawyer, and he's the kind of person that wants to know all the details, and I'm not sure I can give them.

Riess: About the manufacture, for instance?

Bowles: Yes, and all that sort of thing. That is very interesting, but there's an awful lot to know, and I don't know it all by any means. There's a long way to go.

Riess: It's true that porcelain books usually start by discussing the material, and decoration then comes along afterwards.

Bowles: Yes, if they hadn't had the right kind of clay, of course they couldn't have made anything, so that of course is crucial. Very important.

Riess: Are there factories that remain that you might look at, or that have been--as we would do in this country--restored as museums?

Bowles: I've been down to the Chelsea District in London where they now have new developments and condominiums. But I really haven't been to the exact site, no, I haven't done that. I think you probably could, but I doubt if it's even marked. They often, of course, had a factory right on a river somewhere, and then they just dropped all the lead or whatever they didn't want in the river, so it would go down. I haven't really done that, no. I have in France a little. But I've certainly been to some fine collections in England. That I've done, and that's pretty nice.

Appraised Value

Riess: You said that you had the passion for the blue and white, and we've looked at some of the blue and white. What happened next? Were you trying to stay with Worcester?

Bowles: At first, we were going to stay with nothing but Worcester, exactly. And that was just going to be it. That little pitcher [Worcester ?] was $75.

Riess: This is normal appreciation, to go from $75 in 1967 to $900? What is "plus 35 percent?"

Bowles: Well, when I first had this appraised in 1986 I called, because all of this had to be insured, and I said, "What do we do? Shall we just have you come again and do a new appraisal?" I think it was the Antique Porcelain Company [that] said, "Well, because we were there fairly recently, I would just say add 35 percent all the way down the line." So that was why we did that.

And then, of course, when I actually went to give it to the museum [1992], the bottom had dropped out of everything, including all the auctions, and the bottom had dropped out of the porcelain market as well. But it was the year to give, and I was glad to do it. If it had been at the peak of the market when I had given I would have had a much better tax deduction, but I'd made up my mind, and I'm glad I did it because now it's one less thing for me to worry about. And the way I look at it is that I was fortunate to have enjoyed doing it, and that's that. You just take what you can get.

Riess: You had the appraisal done by Antique Porcelain Company?

Bowles: That was one of my first appraisals, and then after that I had it done by Bob Williams, who was a really fine dealer in London. He's been my final appraiser, actually. He's really an authority, just excellent. Now he's retired, but he's still in the business --you never really retire from the porcelain business. He goes to all the auctions, and he keeps up on things.

But he was very disappointed, too, when I called. It was just the peak of when the whole art market had fallen. He said, "I'll tell you, it's just terrible, the difference." Anyway, but that's the way it was.

Riess: Did he come over here?

Bowles: Yes, he did.

Riess: How long did it take him to do the appraisal?

Bowles: About five days, something like that.

Riess: Did he have to work very hard to figure out some things?

Bowles: Yes, but it's a lot easier for the person if it has been done before, because then you have all the data.

Riess: Did Bob Williams know your collection before?

Bowles: Yes. All these people, if somebody really collects, they know what everyone has. In fact, they're very careful about saying who they're coming to see. There's somebody in Seattle, and they might pick up a piece from her. You never know when a collector might sell, and so they're always looking around for someone who's wanting to sell.

Riess: But you say they're very careful not to give out this information.

Bowles: Yes, exactly. For instance, I had someone recently out here to give an appraisal, and he didn't tell me--I didn't care much one way or another--but he was going down to Monterey where somebody had a couple of pieces they might want to sell. And of course he's not going to tell me that, because I might call the person, if I wanted that, and say, "What do you have to sell?" I might offer them more. Or who knows what I might do. So they're very careful, and they have to be. I think if you're a dealer, you're a dealer.

But Bob has been very honest and very good. I have never had any trouble with a dealer. The ones we've dealt with have been very on the up-and-up, I think.

Approaching to Purchase Directly

Riess: I didn't get the impression when we talked the last time that you would call people directly. I think I asked you that.

Bowles: You mean if they had a piece for sale?

Riess: Yes.

Bowles: I've never known anyone that had a piece for sale. Oh, yes, I did hear through a dealer--that's right, there was a woman up in the Sonoma Valley, I believe it was. I did call her, and she

apparently had been dealing a lot. When I say dealing, she had been selling quite a lot to various dealers. So when I called her, she said, "Oh, well I'm off to London, but I'll send you a picture of a teapot I have in case you're interested." And she sent me the picture, but she never told me what she wanted. If I had really been interested, I would have followed up and called her and said, "Well, how much do you want for it?"

But it is a lot of dickering that goes on. I guess most people are happier to sell to a dealer, although they don't get as much, than to an individual, because you never know. If you don't know the individual, maybe they're not really going to pay, or--I don't know. It's just a complicated business.

Riess: I can't imagine two women who are strangers to each other working this thing out very comfortably.

Bowles: No, I think that would be hard, and I can't imagine it either. I don't think it would work very well. It's just not a good idea, either, I don't think it really is. I don't think much of that goes on, although I think that there are people maybe that trade pieces back and forth. But you have to spend a lot of time. I would never have that kind of time to spend with somebody, and every piece that I have bought, I have always liked, so I didn't want to deal with anybody that way.

Critiques of the Bowles Porcelain Collection

Bowles: I did have someone come here and say, "Well, you know, you should refine the collection, you should get rid of the things that you don't really need or want." But I never was able to do that. They also suggested I give some of the blue and white pieces to my children, and I did do a little of that, but they really don't want to be bothered. They'd like to have a few pieces, but they're liable to drop them or--. And then it destroys the collection, because you really want to keep it together. So the only way I could figure to keep it together was to give it to the museum.

Riess: Who was it who made this suggestion?

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Bowles: It was Anthony deBoulay from Christie's, and he was an authority on Chinese ceramics. He said that one should do that with a collection, selectively go over things and upgrade. That we have

never felt the need to do. We liked the pieces, we loved each piece--we wouldn't have bought them otherwise--so we couldn't seem to part with anything. And now I'm glad I didn't.

Riess: And if you had upgraded, let's say you had done that, what direction would it have taken? You said getting rid of the blue and white, but substituting what?

Bowles: What would I have bought instead? Well, I don't think there was much that I missed. In other words, anything that I really wanted I've pretty much been able to buy, which is quite fortunate.

The only thing I might have done--. What some collectors do if they don't have very much money to spend, for example, they'll get rid of the blue and white and buy one piece of something else. I never felt I had to do that, because when I saw something I really liked, I bought it. Or Henry bought it. So I never had that feeling that by selling something I could buy something else. That's what a lot of collectors do, and they get a lot of fun out of doing that, but I wouldn't get much fun out of it because I'd miss the piece that I'd sold. It would be hard for me to do that.

Riess: When you think of the collection, it is defined by the fact that you began with the first piece and just went on--the process.

Bowles: Yes, and as Mrs. Ashley used to say, they're all link pieces. They're very important because they link one to the next. That is showing you the progress of how it evolved, sort of from blue and white into the more elaborate and polychrome. It's very important to have those links, because you need examples in that short space that we were talking about of years, to show how they did progress.

Riess: Let's look at them with that in mind.

1992 Thoughts on Adding to the Collection

Riess: Let me ask you a question: when you say that you have been able to get more or less just what you wanted to get, what is behind your decision to buy from Robyn Robb the Hans Sloane botanical?

Bowles: It's the first time I've seen one that was that perfect and that appealed to me. I like the balance and the way the plant is placed, and the butterfly, and it's the first time I've seen one in perfect shape in a long time.

There's another one I have in the other room that I bought maybe five years ago that I also walked in and instantly knew I liked it. It's like looking at a house. You like it or you don't like it the minute you walk in. And it takes me longer to think about it, but I think that I can pretty well tell now what I like.

And I can recognize in someone's house, if I go there, I can almost tell you exactly if it's a Worcester teapot. I can make a mistake, of course, too. I think I'm knowledgeable enough to know that.

Riess: If you had an opportunity to buy an O'Neale, you have a lot of O'Neale already--.

Bowles: Would I buy any more? Yes, I would. In fact, I would buy almost anything that I saw that I felt was good. I wouldn't hesitate. But there has just been so little coming to market now. The other day, I had a little catalogue come from London, and the one on the cover looked very attractive. It was a piece of Worcester. And by the time I called, it was gone.

Riess: So you would assume that the silver-shaped dish that we just looked at in this catalogue, the O'Neale, is probably gone?

Bowles: I'm sure, yes. Absolutely.

It's the old story, the really good things go. There's always someone who is going to buy the top things. They may not pay the price that they paid ten years ago, but they know, and these people are out there. There's always going to be a market for the rare things. Even if it isn't as high a price as you'd like there's always going to be a market. The lower things may not bring the price, because there's just not the demand. But fine things I think will always hold their value.

Curatorial Concerns

Riess: Is there usually a museum director somewhere over the shoulder of a collector? When someone buys the really perfect piece, the two or three last remaining, do you think that there's a kind of buzz among museum people who will very soon be courting that person to turn over their collection?

Bowles: Yes, I think in fact in San Francisco there is a group of people that are quite openly looking for collectors that have museum-type collections, whether it be paintings or whatever. And of course,

those people are welcomed into the circle of the museum. They very much encourage them, because they hope that when they die they'll give their collection to the museum. And that's perfectly fine.

The only problem is that for me with the porcelain, when I first started collecting we had a very good curator. Life was a little easier, and people were paid fairly--it wasn't ever enough, I guess. But we don't have a ceramic person now in the museum that is really an authority or very knowledgeable, so it makes it hard. It's a very narrow field.

I think someday that's what I would like to see, that they had a special person that would just handle the ceramics. Because it's just too much to do it all, there're too many fields--silver, and glass, and a million other things. And very much depends on what the curator likes, too.

They've just had a huge scandal at the museum. The woman that was a curator was in Paris and bought a salt cellar, soft paste. I don't know much about French pottery, but it was pottery, not porcelain. It was supposed to be rare, and she paid $150,000 for it, and they thought it was wonderful and so forth. I looked at it, and I didn't know much about French, it looked all right, but I obviously didn't know anything about it.

About a year later, they've had somebody here from the Smithsonian and several other places, and they are sure that it's a fake. Well, the poor curator had to go back to the dealer in Paris, and they're supposed to back that up if there is a problem. He had to admit that yes, he didn't realize it, but that it was not what he had said it was. So he's refunding the money. They haven't received the money yet, but I guess they're going to.

I was surprised that that would happen, but it does happen, and it happens more and more because there're so many people that are out trying to, pretending to, make something be something it's not. Particularly in porcelain you have to be very careful.

And the other thing that gets overdone is that then there're so many people who are highly suspicious that after a while, they're beginning to say, "Oh, that isn't right and that isn't right," and then nothing is right!

Riess: Dealers, or collectors?

Bowles: Well, just people generally. They're dealers, but they're also mostly museum people. It's like the book world. Nothing they'd

like better than to discover that this is a fake or that this has been bought by the wrong person for the wrong reasons.

Riess: You mean the curatorial people.

Bowles: Yes, yes. And of course, that's their responsibility, so they have to be extremely careful. But even among porcelain people, they love to say--.

I'll never forget when I had my first collection here. Did I tell you about that? A woman who was very well-known from Seattle, a Mrs. Faulkner, I was thrilled because we had her for tea. Afterwards I took her in to show her my collection, and she said, "Humph, those aren't Worcester, those two plates." And I said, "Aren't they?"

She said, "They certainly are not." I thought, well, gee, maybe she's right. But I bought them from Mrs. Ashley. Anyway, quite a few years later I saw a book on Japanese porcelain by Soames Jennings, who's an authority, a fine authority, and in the book there was a picture of the exact plate that I have in Worcester, and he said that this was a Japanese plate but it had been copied at Worcester. Of course, there it all was.

So these things happen. She was a very knowledgeable woman, but she just thought it was Japanese, and it was not going to be Worcester.

Riess: Oh, dear. But it is like parading out your children.

Bowles: Yes, it is. [laughs] It really is. You get rather defensive about it after a while, too.

Riess: You would wish your museum directors and curators and advisors to know more than you do.

Bowles: Yes. I told you about Michael Conforti. He was a marvelous man here. They're having such a struggle now, it's just very, very difficult. But it would be wonderful.

Bowles Gallery Planning

Bowles: Of course, we're going to have the study room off the porcelain gallery, which is going to be the only one in the West that I've ever heard of, and they're going to have tapes and film and all

kinds of books. It's going to be quite something. I'm very excited about that.

Riess: Have they started to accumulate that?

Bowles: Yes, they have. We have over two hundred books now, I think, and I'm certainly going to give my collection. I think that's an easy thing to give. I think people are going to be more than willing to do that. They'll have someone out there manning it, so that if people come in and they want to find out something, they will be right available. That's a pretty exciting step.

Riess: That kind of thing is very well-done at the Getty, tapes and videos.

Bowles: I haven't been down to see that. I'll have to see that. You mean at the Getty that's out in Malibu?

Riess: Yes. They explain, for instance, how small bronze castings are done or other techniques.

Bowles: The Getty has very elaborate French porcelain, beautiful, I guess, but very, very elaborate. I mean, I'm not trying to sound sour, but it just doesn't appeal to me. I think it's just glorious, and the whole place is stunning. I love that museum. But the porcelain part is what I'm talking about. It's overwhelmingly beautiful, but nothing that--. Maybe if I had had that kind of money I would have collected it, I don't know. I don't think so, but you never know. Too overdone.

Riess: Back to our review of your collection, I like the idea that there is a linking thing happening here.

Bowles: Well, I think there is. For instance, I only have one very early piece of blue and white--I'm trying to see where the picture is of that mug, they call it a mug, it has a handle on it. It's called Lund's Bristol. That's the earliest piece of blue and white I have. And in a way, I should have collected more of it.

Maybe I just don't have that picture in here. [looking through book]

Riess: The word knop?

Bowles: That fascinates people. Officially that's what it's called. Now there's a typical knop, they call it a floral knop [Worcester 15]. And it was unique to Worcester, almost unique. I mean, a lot of things have knops on them, but Worcester was always a lovely little flower or some marvelous thing like that.

Riess: Is this your first piece in color? From 1967?

Bowles: It might have been, yes. That might have been. Isn't it charming?

More on Rea Ashley

Riess: When you said that you went on Satrudays to her shop and sat and talked with Mrs. Ashley, does that mean that every week she would have some new things in that you might have been looking at?

Bowles: I think that Mrs. Ashley had a collection of her own at home. I know she did, because I went to her apartment once. And I think she did bring down different things. She really ran the shop because she enjoyed running a shop. She liked the people that came in. Her sons, I think, tried to stop her, and she would have none of it. She was way into her eighties, and she still continued to run it. She was such a charming, interesting woman.

But yes, I think she brought things back and forth. I think she knew exactly what she was doing. Also she sometimes gave classes, and she took pieces with her to the classroom. She claimed that unless you actually held and felt a piece you would never know anything about it. And she would pass--and those were her early days--she'd pass these cups around to twenty-five women, and heavens knows they might have dropped one! But they never did. She just felt that you had to feel something to really appreciate it.

Riess: You went to the classes?

Bowles: No, I never did, but I had heard about them. I never had time! I don't whether she--. I guess a lecture possibly is what she had. I don't know if she really had a class.

Riess: Did she take you under her wing, would you say? Was that the relationship with you and Henry?

Bowles: We became good friends, but we were never what I would call close. We were good friends. She was our porcelain friend. We all kept our distance, so to speak. I think one night we picked her up and took her to a meeting, or something like that, but we never really became very close. It was always porcelain that we talked about. We never talked about children or--.

Riess: But once a week, talking about porcelain?

Bowles: I know, but it was always so interesting. That was the curious thing. That's what was so crazy about us. We loved it, we really adored it.

I don't say we went every week, because after all, we were duck hunting or fishing or skiing, but we went often. And on a rainy Saturday--there weren't that many rainy Saturdays--but it seemed to me we went quite often. Especially when we were first caught by the bug, we really went a lot. After that, it tapered off.

The other thing that happened is we'd bought most everything that we thought was of real interest for us. That's another thing about a dealer, you begin to know his stock, and you know what you're going to buy, and then when you're finished with that and he doesn't add anything more, you move on to someone else. I think that's what happened with Mrs. Ashley. I think we pretty much bought all the things that she thought were interesting and we thought were interesting. So then it was over. It was like a romance. [laughs]

Charm of Irregularities

Riess: This lovely piece from Adele Morton's shop with the fine floral knop, how did you decide to break away then from your blue and white?

Bowles: Well, because I thought it was so enchanting, the way the flowers were painted--everything about it was so simple. The simplicity of the things is so devastating. You look carefully at that spout--you can't see it too much in the picture--it doesn't mention it in the description, but it's angled, it has different flat surfaces, it's not <u>just</u> a spout.

I mean, when you start studying these things, and you see the work these people must have gone to, it's remarkable. And so as I say, it's not just a teapot. And yet it really is. Then look at the way they're painted--these things are just beautiful, really.

Riess: It's a perfectly smooth surface?

Bowles: No, it's rather rough. Lots of times they had a little rough spot, and that was what made soft paste so interesting, they'd put a flower over it! There was probably a defect here or a defect there, but they figured it was pretty good, and it was probably as best they could ever do, so they would just leave it. No, some of

this is quite rough, actually. But of course, that's the charm of it.

There's a blue and white teapot in here [Worcester 21?] that's completely sagging, and that was the whole idea. Everybody raves about it, because it's sagging and it shows what they were struggling to do. [looking] Where is that teapot? Oh, there it is. Now, that had the knop broken off when I bought it--I also bought that from Adele Morton.

People just rave about this, because it is very irregular. In the first place, the shape is glorious: it's all panels, and so is the spout, I think, panels. When you look at it on a table it is actually lopsided. So it sagged in the kiln, and the poor thing--. But that, apparently, is very sought after, a piece like that, because it shows what they were really struggling to do.

Now, at one time John Sandon said, "Oh, I'll send you a knop for the top of that." Well, he never did send it, and I think it's probably better that we don't have it, because we don't know exactly what it might have looked like had it a knop on it.

Riess: There's a lot that seems just a little wrong about it, but it's what's fascinating about it.

Bowles: Right. And it's so strong. It has a lot happening.

Let me take you in the other room and show you a couple of pieces. I don't want to bore you to death with this.

Connie's Gallery: Hans Sloanes

Bowles: [in breakfast room, looking at Hans Sloane botanical plates] Hans Sloane--I have to get this story straight--he had a book of botanical prints. These plates were copied from the botanical prints.

The Chelsea Physic Garden is where he raised some of these exotic plants that were brought--now, that's a mango--from the South Seas, a lot of these, and then they made drawings of them. The Chelsea people copied the drawings, and they adapted them for their own use, really. I've never found the book that has these [botanical] prints in them. I'd like to.

Now, these [two artichokes] are, of course, some of my favorites, and Henry gave them to me on our twenty-fifth

anniversary. I remember it so well! He always tried to please me with a lovely surprise. It was just so exciting, and they are really--I've never seen anything like them, ever, ever. I just think they're fantastic.

Riess: So when someone else sees them, like Simon Spero--do people get really giddy about them?

Bowles: [laughing] Probably just me! What happens is that everybody always wants to see the collection, and then I bring them in to see it and I start explaining things, and in a few minutes I look at them and their eyes are completely glazed, they have no idea what I'm talking about!

Riess: Are there only two of these in the world, as far as you know?

Bowles: Well, I don't know about in the world, but I haven't ever seen another pair. Except maybe at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and I'm not sure that they have a pair like that exactly. Of course, they have a fabulous collection.

Now, this [Hans Sloane plate] is fairly recent. Henry was long since gone when I bought it. This was about four years ago, and I walked into a shop in London and I said, "I'll have to have it." I thought the cut asparagus were so humorous.

I mean, the other thing about them is that they had a sense of humor, it seems to me. There's another piece of cut asparagus, and there's a worm, and the butterfly, and then the little pieces that if the plate wasn't quite right, they put a flower over it, if it was a little mistake.

Riess: Beauty mark.

Bowles: Yes. But to me, they have a humorous quality about them. There is a light-heartedness about them that seems to be so charming. It isn't just a serious set thing.

Now these are ironstone [also in display cases], and they're just a set pattern. That's it. They'll always be that, and they're always nice, but they're not exciting.

Here's an O'Neale piece over here that I bought because I loved the idea of the longhorn cattle. I think that is just marvelous. It's a fable--two little mice down there, or frogs, or whatever they are. It's not so easy to find these fables. Some of them are parts of one and parts of another in Barlow or Aesop, so they made them up, too. They probably just decided they'd like a mouse in there, with a longhorn steer. But I had to have that

because of early California and the longhorn steer, and all the other excuses that I have for buying things.

Riess: Under the Hans Sloanes, what is this shape?

Bowles: It's a kidney shape, pretty much kidney shape. At least that's what we call it.

Now, these plates are a little later. These are not really Hans Sloane. I would say they are a little bit later, and they're not quite as beautifully done, not quite as well-painted. We bought those sight-unseen at auction. We were having fun doing that, and then finally we had somebody that looked at things. That's why it was so important to have someone look at things in London, because you don't know what the condition is of some of these things.

Riess: This display, does it change?

Bowles: Well, it's going to change when I get a new one.

Every time I buy something I'll be eliminating the ironstone more and more. But I didn't want it to be completely blank, and so I have just sort of tucked in what I had. Those are very interesting ironstone, but I think it's sort of monotonous to see the same--I never like to go into a collection and see just the same set of plates, as decorators often do, a whole set of orange and white plates. I don't think that's very interesting. But then who am I to say that? But it <u>isn't</u> very interesting, frankly.

Riess: And you <u>are</u> the person to say that.

What is this?

Bowles: This is a marvelous little piece of modern Herend that I just bought the other day, because I thought it was so charming. Don't you love it? I think it's very, very nice.

Genial Jim Hart, when we went to Budapest I said, "I'll go to Budapest if I can go to Herend." So we drove miles out in the country and arrived at the factory, and they were so disagreeable, because they were controlled by the Russians still, and they were just cranky and awful. I think they were pretty frustrated.

I said I wanted to buy something, and they said, "Well, too late, we're going to close. And if you're going to buy anything, we have to have real dollars, American dollars." I did buy a few things. Now Herend I think is improving a lot, or at least

sending over a lot of things to the United States. It's going to be kind of a collector's item someday, I suppose. They're turning it out again.

As you can see, I love hand-done things [entering next room]

Riess: [walking into dining room] Look at this wallpaper!

Bowles: Yes, isn't that marvelous? A lady here in San Francisco did it. I just think it's marvelous. She really is so clever. This was in canvas panels. I wanted her to sign it, but she hasn't done that.

Riess: Who is she?

Bowles: Joanne Day is her name.

Riess: They are like the Kakiemon-style birds.

Bowles: They are, and that's a feeling I wanted to get, too. She studied antique screens and chinoiserie, and I think she is a serious student with talent.

Riess: How long have you had that paper?

Bowles: That's since Henry's been gone. That's within the last ten years. I sort of seem to date everything from him, from his loss [1981].

[tape interruption]

[looking at Bowles catalogue] Oh, that's the "disheveled bird." [laughter] Isn't that a wonderful expression? And then this is a masked jug [Worcester 22].

Thoughts on Simon Spero's Catalogue

Riess: In the completed catalogue will you have all the Worcesters together, and the Chelsea, and so on?

Bowles: I'm not quite sure. Simon Spero has his head on this. He can do whatever he wants. I thought it was better to let him do what he felt was the best thing to do. I have a feeling he'll keep the manufactories together. In other words, he'll keep the Worcester and the Chelsea separate.

It would be an interesting idea to [put things together for comparison]--but it would make it too hard, I think, for people to follow it, because it's very hard to go back and forth, although some of them were simultaneous, actually. I think that it would be hard to do that. I think he'll probably just stay with sections.

Riess: And stay with your chronological development, or with the chronological development of the china?

Bowles: [laughs] My chronological development! Who knows how long that's going to be? You mean my three marriages? Everybody says to me, "My goodness, you've married three times and keep changing your name. What's the matter with you?"

No, I think he'll stay with the chronological development of the porcelain. I think that's more satisfactory, and more understandable possibly! I think he will do that.

Riess: The book that we have been looking at is now in order of acquisition?

Bowles: Yes, because of the way they were numbered. It was complicated enough doing that without getting into the actual progression.

Riess: So there's no reason why the book that we are looking at would "link," because it's only in hindsight that you have been able to fill in things so that you've created links.

Bowles: Yes, and the catalogue he's doing I hope will show the links, because I think that's very important. I think it would be foolish if he doesn't, because it will make so much more sense to show the sequence. I should talk to him more about that, but I felt that he will do a good job on it. And he feels that I should do more of a job on the introduction. That's why I thought of talking to you, because if I can get it down in black and white it would make a very interesting introduction, and so many catalogues are really pretty dull.

The Unique Pursuit

Bowles: [I would like it] if we could bring it to life, and make it [the collecting] something that somebody else could do, if they wanted to. It's nothing unique that we've done, yet the longer I live, the more I feel it has been unusual to have a man and a woman really both be so interested in something that has been very

exciting for them, and apparently going to be pretty exciting for a lot of other people. There's no reason why other people can't do it, and I hope that will give people the idea that it isn't just a woman's world for porcelain. It can be a man's world, and it can be a woman's world for stamps, as far as that goes, or anything else.

I give Henry a lot of credit, though, because I think it also gives a purpose to your travels, to your whole rest of your life, because it enters into so many phases. And of course, you meet a lot of interesting people. It's a link--again, using that word link, but it's a link to so many other worlds. More so than books, I'd say, though I love books.

Books, you can always stop with books. You run out of money, or that's the end of it, and you don't need to buy any more books. But with porcelain, it becomes kind of a disease. You really have to have that final piece, you want one of those final pieces. It never ends.

Riess: The Bowes Collection [Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, a collection made in the 1860s and 1870s] was made in part with the intention--they had no children--of perpetuating a name. Do you think that Henry had something of that in mind?

Bowles: Yes, he was very civic-minded, and I think he felt that.

We loved the porcelain gallery at the Legion. He would say, "I wish they had some more interesting things. All they have are sets of Mrs. deBrettville's [Alma deBretteville Spreckels]." That was very nice, but not very interesting. To porcelain people it's just a bore, or to anyone really. As I say, decorators love to have a whole set of orange and white, whatever, but if you know anything at all it's just not very stimulating.

I guess that was part of a goal, but we never really thought of calling it the "Bowles Porcelain Gallery." Now that sort of appeals to me, I think a certain amount of that. But I think he just thought that it was so special to be able to have a room like that in the museum, which is unique. There's no other [porcelain] room that I know of--. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts has the best porcelain collection I think almost in the United States, and it's down in the basement, in the dreariest room you ever saw. You'd have to be searching to go down there, because it's dull and it's uninteresting.

I'm hoping this is going to bring our collection alive, and that it will make people really see that it's something pretty thrilling. And with the natural daylight I think it should be

wonderful. They'll know something is there. At least it won't be way down in the basement. It will only be the second basement. [laughs]

Never an Argument, and Other Thoughts on Marriage, Independence

Riess: You are right to think that a hundred or two hundred years from now, probably sooner, people who visit this collection will wonder who the people are who put it together. They'll also wonder what the influences were, and they'll wonder which things Mr. Bowles was particularly fond of, and which things Mrs. Bowles was particularly fond of.

Are there pieces and a direction that you associate more with Henry than with you?

Bowles: Well, those two beakers that we always laughed about. But as I look at it, no. It was really a joint collection. I can really say that. It's funny. I mean, there were times when he'd say, "That piece looks really interesting in the catalogue, how do you feel about it?" And very seldom did I say, "I don't like that at all." Once in a while.

But it was incredible, because we agreed about so many things. And that's the way it was. There was never really an argument about what to buy. It was only a matter of, "Do we have enough money to buy it?" I don't think it's ever been a problem. I guess that was just sheer good luck or whatever. And I think maybe he wanted me to have what I wanted. Maybe that was it. But it seemed to me there was never a problem about him liking what I liked.

I am drawn to the intellectual, very much, I really am. It's just something that I find fascinating. That's all I have to say about that! But it's somebody that's very well-read, and that knows more than I do, mostly. I just find it so appealing.

Riess: And it brings out the best in you, I'm sure.

Bowles: I think it does. And as I say, I hadn't thought about it until recently, but that's the way it is. That's not a big conclusion to come to, but I hadn't really given it much thought until somebody said, "Well, how were you lucky enough to marry three people that really make you happy?" I said, "Maybe that's the answer," because they really all are intellectuals, and such interesting people. And they were alive to the world, to things

that are going on. I guess that's what we're all here for. And they enjoy my passions.

Riess: I guess a true intellectual is quite self-sufficient.

Bowles: Yes, that's very true.

Riess: Wonderful to be around someone who has a lot of self-sufficiency.

Bowles: It is, because so many people really rely on someone and want to capture or control somebody. And it's the last thing that an intellectual wants; they want a little more peace and quiet than they get! [laughs] So I've been very fortunate. It's very nice. I also feel that I can be independent, because I need to be independent.

Riess: That's something that I think is important to bring out in your own words. I am realizing that there's no one person who has guided you through collecting, or no particular need to have someone's approval, it sounds like. Is that really true, that you're independent of people's approval of your collection?

Bowles: I am quite passionate and sure of my taste, so I rarely question it.

It's so funny, because if I stop to think about it, I have no friends that are interested. None. I don't know. I think I am fiercely independent, and yet very dependent in some ways. It's hard to say. I know that I like scouting things out. I think that has been fun for me, that part of it. And I guess I like feeling that I know one area at least a little bit well. I think that's important, because there're so many things that you know just the fringes of--. There's so much I don't know.

San Francisco Ceramic Circle

Riess: In the San Francisco Ceramic Circle, are there others who are collecting 18th-century English porcelain?

Bowles: Yes, there are. Raymond Yarbrough has been a big help to me. He's just a delightful man. I was thinking of having him here sometime when you are here, because he can correct any misstatements I make, and you might enjoy him. In fact I gave him, as I told you, your questions, because I wanted him to help me before you came--I didn't get around to it. He's been on jury duty.

He was a high school teacher in Hillsborough. He and his wife are just delightful. They knew Henry well, and so we've known him a long time. We never really saw them a lot, but you know, he's my porcelain friend, and he's delightful. He's been head of the ceramic circle. He collects 18th-century English Bow. But they collect a variety of things.

I'm somewhat impatient with a lot of collectors, because they don't concentrate on one area. I think that you can't just go around collecting a little bit of this and a little bit of that, because it's not consistent. I don't call that a collector. I think a person is a collector who sets out with a definite idea of years and period, and tries to contain it. The narrower the collection I think the more interesting it is. I think we have tried to do that, and I think we have succeeded.

When I go to the ceramic circle meetings--and unfortunately I also like a very busy social life, so I don't get to many of those meetings--it seems to me that people collect--. Maybe they have no other way of doing it, but they collect bits and pieces, and they're kind of fractured in what they're doing. They're interested in everything.

You can't be interested in everything, or it's meaningless. I mean, I am interested in a lot of things, but when it comes to collecting, I try to concentrate.

Riess: Do you think that interest in everything is a first stage?

Bowles: No, I think there are a lot of people that are <u>never</u> interested in any particular phase. I think they are just generally interested, and that's fine, but for me, they're not really collectors.

Riess: Well, in a way, it's not fine, because it sort of muddies the water for the people who are really after a narrow slice.

Bowles: Yes, and it makes one very impatient. I'm impatient because I want to get to the center of what <u>I'm</u> interested in, which sounds very selfish. I think that you have to center your interest, because you can't get around to all those things.

When I go to ceramic meetings I marvel at how it has stayed together and the interest that people have. It's wonderful, very good, and they've had some excellent speakers, and I love it when they have a seminar.

Riess: Do they travel together?

Bowles: They have never done that, and I thought they ought to really try doing that, because it would be fascinating to go to Charleston, and to Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. The trouble with so many of these things, you think, "What a wonderful experience it's going to be," and you get there and you've heard all about this marvelous thing, and it's not all that good. Now Atlanta, I have the catalogue from there, and apparently the High Museum now has quite a good collection [Francis and Emory Cocke Collection].

But you hear the gossip, and from dealers, about something like that. There was a woman in Atlanta--I believe she has since died--who collected porcelain. And the dealers reached her, and they said, "If we are going to make a catalogue, you will have to fill the gaps." So they went out and bought pieces to fill her gaps.

So now, that's not really her collection. I mean, sure, it's her collection, but it wasn't something she created, where she consistently went after various things that she knew she needed. Anyway, that's the way some collections are formed, and that's fine, but I think they lack a personality then. I think a collection should represent the person, too. There you are, your personality; every one of those pieces, you've put your heart on the line saying you think it's wonderful. And if it isn't, well, that's your fault.

Riess: That's why you aren't interested in weeding out the early blue and white, because that is who you were.

Bowles: Right. I wouldn't have bought it if I hadn't just loved it. And I think you have to feel vitally excited about it. What I can't understand, when I think about it when I talk to you, is why haven't I interested very many of my friends in it? Actually, I have, because they say, "Why don't you give us a talk?" Well, I'm not interested in giving anyone a talk, because I know that they're not going to be interested for more than five minutes. It's very hard to get someone excited about a subject that they don't know anything about.

Sharing the Enthusiasm: A Hans Sloane with Melons

Riess: But you are saying two things: that some of your friends say to you, "Why don't you take us with you?" And you say, "No! I don't want to do that!" And then you wonder why your friends don't know anything about the subject?

Bowles: [laughing] I know. Well, I'm afraid that I've been to so many lectures that are so boring, where they stand up and show you a colored slide and say, "Now, this is a Chelsea botanical," and everybody says, "Oh, God, what's that?"

Riess: Why couldn't you get any friend of yours excited about this Hans Sloane with the perfectly beautiful melons on it [looking at photograph in Bowles catalogue]? Would you talk about it, for me?

Bowles: It is an incredible plate, it really is. The whole feeling is just unbelievable. It's so free and yet so balanced.

Riess: How would you describe it?

Bowles: Well, in the first place, I think it's very strong. Whoever did that had a lot of strength of character, I guess I'd say, because there's nothing wishy-washy about it. There's something so alive and real about it. We grow melons in the San Joaquin Valley that look exactly like that. Now, this is probably an Israeli melon, taken from a picture or a drawing of an Israeli melon.

Riess: In the 18th century there would be a drawing of an Israeli melon?

Bowles: [laughs] There might be. There just might be.

Riess: The painters were men?

Bowles: They were mostly men, yes.

Riess: Not your idea of an English lady china painter.

Bowles: Not at all, no. That's another thing, they're very strong and vital. I don't know whether they drank, or whatever, but O'Neale apparently was a strong character, too. He was a French Huguenot who was driven out of France, so he came to England, but he had studied in France. It gives me the feeling that they were pretty sophisticated people in their way. I mean, they had a certain sophistication, not in the ugly word of sophistication, but they were people with sensitivity.

Riess: But they were considered craftsmen, rather than artists?

Bowles: I guess. I guess.

Riess: This plate is crowded.

Bowles: And yet it's well-balanced, so you're not overwhelmed by it. There's enough white so that you don't feel it's too much. At least, I don't.

But that's another thing: how could I make someone really feel the way I do about these things? How could I? Pretty hard to do. I don't know that I could. So that's why I don't. And to be very frank with you, do I really care? Do I want them to be interested? I don't know. And it makes me nervous to stand up there and talk to a lot of people. Do I want to try and teach somebody? Not especially. I really don't. I don't think it would prove much. Maybe they'd be very bored, and I'd be nervous.

Bowles: When I first had the collection I'd have people over in the afternoon to talk about it. And some of the younger women around here like Dagmar Dolby, who's very lively and cute, and she bought at auction a couple of things, she called me and asked me if I would look at them, which I did, which has been fun. But then I lose track, well, did she buy another piece? I don't know; I doubt it.

There's a lot of interest around, if I really took the time. But I don't think I really want to do that.

Riess: Maybe what happens is that somebody has something that's of dubious merit, and they want you to come and love it.

Bowles: Yes. But I haven't been asked to do that much. That I'm glad of, nobody asked me that very much, so that's fine.

Lecturers

Bowles: I also feel sort of like it's ostentatious to stand up and say, "I have this I bought, and it's so beautiful." I feel as though that's kind of gilding the lily, or whatever you want to call it. I think that's sort of presumptuous.

Riess: And you say that the lectures you've gone to have not been good.

Bowles: I have never been to one that was any good, almost never. So that makes me know that you've got to be a remarkable person to make it interesting, and maybe you have to just know a lot more than I do.

The only person I heard once that was very good was a man from Williamsburg, John Austin. He's one of the most delightful people. I still see him and talk to him on the telephone. He is a warm, charming man, besides being knowledgable. He could bring the whole business of porcelain alive when he spoke about it at Williamsburg, describing what the 18th-century life would have been, and where these things might have been placed, and that sort

of thing. It's the only time I've heard anything even halfway interesting, and not pedantic.

It's just not something where you can stand up and say so-and-so. Maybe someday I'll develop it, if I talk to you long enough! [laughs] Maybe I'll become an expert.

Riess: Now you can say, "Read the book."

Bowles: Yes, exactly. "Read my lips." [laughs] Maybe I can sell it. The museum is hoping to sell some of these catalogues, you know. They will have to sell them to make expenses. I guess they will, but they're costly. I have some catalogues over there that are $85.

Riess: The color work is costly, and it has to be done on good paper.

Bowles: It has to be good. We've had a very good photographer do the pictures, I believe.

I must call Simon; I haven't talked to him for a long time. You'll have to meet him when he's here. He's just delightful, and so is his wife. They're fairly young--I mean, young, fifty. They have two teenage children. They're just charming. And he makes a living selling porcelain. Now, that takes some doing. I don't think that's too easy. He has done quite a few catalogues, and he writes articles. He's a pretty lively fellow.

At Peace with the Dovecote

Bowles: In 1973 we bought a dovecote at auction, from Christie's in London--and I have some notes that similar ones are in Woburn Abbey and in the Metropolitan Museum of New York--but here is a quote from Collectors and Antique Dealers Guide. And the reason I quote this is that we were sort of horrified.

> "The unusual character of the dovecote one recent morning at Christie's roused the congregation to enthusiasm and was bought for 800 guineas."

This was by us, of course.

The writer of the quote confesses he has seen more beautiful pieces and is shocked at the high price. He does go on to say it bears the red anchor mark and comes from Chelsea's finest period.

Well, most people just think that [the dovecote] is the best thing out there [at the museum]. It is so charming, and humorous. The writer thought it was sort of grotesque, but actually, as I have written, "The whimsey of the piece plus its bucolic strength makes it a favorite of museum goers and ours."

Riess: How large is it?

Bowles: It's quite good sized, seventeen inches high, and eight inches wide. It's strong, it's colorful, it's amusing, and it's big enough. I think that one of the problems with our collection will probably be that the pieces are small, and for a museum that's hard, because they kind of get lost in a big museum.

Anyway, we gave it to the Fine Arts Museums, I think in 1976, and I clearly remember Henry delivering it himself, with the covers for the turrets jangling around in his pockets. That really upset me, because I was sure they were going to get chipped! But anyway, it got out there, and they were thrilled.

Riess: How did you decide to buy such a different piece?

Bowles: I think we just got excited about it. In the first place, there was a connection there, because the fox--that sounds a little remote, but it's sort of like hunting, the idea of the fox and the doves, and the dovecote. It's so romantic, it appealed to our tastes, and we thought it was for us, that it was just our piece. I think Mr. Weinberg probably encouraged us, too.

Riess: You bought it from Christie's. You had seen it first?

Bowles: We bought it sight unseen--just from a picture. We didn't see it, no, I don't think we actually saw that.

There are things that at first I thought were ghastly. It's a strange thing. When you first see some of these things, you think, "God, that's ugly. That is just terrible." And then you change. It's curious. I didn't know I could change that much. And I guess again, it's just knowledge.

Riess: Where did you display the dovecote, before you gave it to the museum?

Bowles: We put it on top of the case. Those cases end kind of around the top of the room, and we put it on the top. Which was not a very safe place to put it at all! Because if it had come crashing down in the earthquake, it would have been terrible. Anyway, that's where it was.

Safekeeping of the Collection

Riess: You could worry about earthquakes, couldn't you.

Bowles: Well, but we didn't. [tape interruption]

When the earthquake came, I was talking on the telephone to my daughter, Bea. I heard everything rattle. I came down, and nothing had broken. It was amazing. But they had moved, if you can believe this, in their stands, actually moved. I felt very fortunate, and I think if it hadn't been for those glass doors, they might have really all fallen out, or many of them anyway.

Riess: For insurance purposes, then, every year you would increase your insurance on them?

Bowles: Yes, and you had to upgrade them, and we had a huge crisis over whether there were locks on the doors and all that sort of thing. So it was a relief in a way [to send the things to the museum] because the insurance was very high. But you couldn't not have it, you had to do it.

The whole thing has been a really happy experience for me. I'm really glad to have done it, and I have a few things left that will be fun to give. I'm just hoping that the museum will get the money to really finish. I'm worried that maybe it will be halfway finished and it will never have a porcelain gallery. But I think it will. They're doing pretty well, so I think that will work.

Riess: Do you find yourself waking up in the middle of the night with regrets?

Bowles: Never. No, I really don't. And that's a funny thing, that I can be just really excited about something, and then completely put it out of my mind, and I'm on to something else. So it doesn't really upset me or worry me, and I really haven't [missed having the collection], although I cried a little today when I was thinking about the bear and beehive plate [Worcester 81]. But I haven't really missed it at all, having it out there.

I know it's just in boxes. I don't really feel badly about it. I feel kind of happy about it. It comes and goes, I guess. When I get involved in it, I get very intense about it. But when it's over, I'm on to something else and I don't really even give it a second thought much. Unless I saw a piece in a store or something that I wanted! That doesn't happen much, either, but I haven't given up.

From Antiques and Fine Arts magazine, September/October 1990

Right—
FABLED SCENES: "The Bear and the Beehives" Worcester dessert plate has a gilt dentil rim and a *gros-bleu* background encircling the images.

Opposite—
COLLECTOR'S EYE: Constance Bowles Hart stands alongside a sampling of her superb collection of early English porcelain. Photograph by Gordon Edwardes.

A PASSION FOR PORCELAIN

The Bowles Collection of Early English Porcelain

The Bowles Collection of Early English Porcelain is not only a thing of beauty, but it is a mirror of the past, reflecting social customs and tastes. Containing as it does examples of the first decades of porcelain making, this collection is a superb revelation of ceramic artistry and technology. As the very name "chinaware" implies, early European porcelains showed an open admiration for the Eastern tradition in their imitation of Oriental prototypes, yet there was a recognition of Western taste.

The process of making true porcelain (hard paste) had been kept a secret from the West for centuries before the mystery was solved in early 18th-century Europe at the Dresden court of Augustus Rex. Italy briefly produced a glassy, soft paste porcelain as early as the 16th century, but it was not until the 18th century that England and France pursued production of a soft paste substitute "porcelain." Germany, having discovered the formula by 1720, produced a true porcelain very much like that imported from China.

England stood alone in one important respect—in this country, porcelain had to win consumer support for its products on the market, while all other European porcelain factories had only to please their royal patrons. Chelsea, Bow, Worcester and the other English porcelain makers (each with its own recipe for the composition) appealed to the gentry and, from the beginning, the market was based on broad public approval. This was in contrast to Sèvres, Meissen, Vienna, Chantilly, Mennecy and St. Cloud porcelains which were made to satisfy the taste of their royal owners.

The Bowles Collection of English porcelain presents a diversity of beauty

BY RAYMOND YARBROUGH

which stimulates the observer to learn the salient facts about it. The facts are inseparable from its design, its form, its function and its metaphor. Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn* contained a most pertinent line: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Yet, in addition to admiring the beauty, one should ask of each ceramic object: What other truths can be known?

The Bowles Collection exemplifies Keat's equation, and it is well worth the time to take a closer look. The greatest components of the collection are Chelsea, Bow, Longton Hall and Worcester. One quickly recognizes that here is a collection assembled lovingly and with a deliberate "game plan" in the formulation. The collection was initiated by Constance Bowles, now Mrs. James Hart, of San Francisco. Her late husband, Henry M. Bowles, took an equally active part in the "sport," once his interest was engaged.

Among the collection, there are nearly 100 pieces of Worcester, 50 of Chelsea, 25 of Bow and 12 of Longton Hall. The numbers tend to mislead because there is superb strength in the quality of the Bow and the Longton Hall, even though they are not found in such profusion as the Worcester and the Chelsea. The viewer soon observes that here is an array of the finest specimens available, each piece chosen for its beauty—for its truth—and for its appeal to the collector.

The Bowleses would probably agree with other noted collectors that they have derived much pleasure from their ceramic adventures and from the friends they have made in this regard. Their pleasure has not been merely in the acquisition of rare ceramic objects. There was travel which was enlivened by opportunities to meet dealers and collectors, and to seek out objects. There were the auction catalogues which gave early previews. Truly, every object evokes a story.

The examples of Chelsea are superb. Chelsea porcelain was made in London between 1745 and 1769, and the Bowles Collection contains objects dating from 1747 to 1756. By 1747, Chelsea had overcome the experimental stage and produced

Above—
FANCIFUL FRUITS: This Chelsea strawberry dish belongs to the early "Incised Triangle" period, 1744-1749.

Opposite—
ORIGINALITY: "Goat and Bee" jug, circa 1745, was modeled after a silver cream jug by the Huguenot, Nicholas Sprimont.

a highly successful coffee pot in *blanc de chine*, c. 1749. It is pear-shaped with applied sprays of tea plant design.

Even earlier were "Goat and Bee" jugs, c. 1745, which derive from a silver cream jug model by the Huguenot, Nicholas Sprimont, who continued practice as a silversmith while creating England's first porcelain manufactory. One "Goat and Bee" jug is a fine example, with its crisply molded white body unadorned with enamel colors, permitting the bee to stand out on the flower-sprigged jug which is supported by two reclining goats. Yet another is highlighted with bright translucent enamel colors. These objects, along with a strawberry dish and two beakers, belong to the early "Incised Triangle" period (1744-49). The "Raised Anchor" period (1749-1752) is represented by floral objects, painted in Meissen-inspired harbor scenes by Jeffreyes Hammet O'Neale.

After this came the "Red Anchor" period. From 1752 to 1758, Sprimont's factory marked its ware with a tiny red anchor usually painted inconspicuously near a foot rim. The "Red Anchor" period includes wonderful European landscapes and Japanese Kakiemon designs, but scenes from fables occur in great profusion on a wide range of forms—cups, saucers, dishes, teapots and cream jugs. The designs for some of the fables derive from Francis Barlow's engravings for *Aesop's Fables*. On porcelain the fables are often accompanied by floral sprays and, as with the botanicals, there are insects, butterflies or even worms used amusingly to cover defects in the surface of the porcelain.

The Bowles Collection contains a great selection of dishes with botanical decorations in the form of flowers, plants, vegetables and insects. There is a strength in these brilliant, dramatic botanical scenes unmatched in other private collections. Such specimens have always been desirable, but in recent years they have gained immensely in popularity. One needs merely to look at the auction records to see the effects of this new rage. The observer will see that the Bowles' botanical dishes are the top of the line. Chelsea presents many

Above—
BRILLIANT BOTANICALS: Chelsea dish with mangoes on a leafy branch.

Opposite top—
AN APPLE A DAY: This pair of small tureens in the form of a yellow-green apple with a brown, arching worm serving as a finial is a fine example of the early designs of the Bow China Manufactory.

Opposite center—
A SCULPTURAL CENTERPIECE: This Chelsea dovecoat, circa 1756, is modeled in the round with a fox disturbing the birds in their sanctuary.

examples of good, even excellent, botanical painting, but nowhere does the quality exceed that found on the dish with mangoes on a leafy branch or the pair of melons with leaves and stems.

Having always been expensive, these ceramic art objects have survived because they have been proudly protected and never subjected to utilitarian function. Upon close observation, some pieces may show some wear from rubbing, perhaps caused by storing or cleaning, but few show signs of table use. No knife has been drawn across to cut a slice of beef, resulting in a scratch in the surface of this soft paste porcelain. It seems that, from the beginning, owners have shown their porcelain in much the same way they take pride in hanging paintings on their walls.

Along with the interest in painted representations of vegetables, flowers and fruits, Chelsea produced many holloware, three-dimensional, organic forms such as melons, artichokes and even a partridge sitting on a nest, all naturalistically colored. It may have been just such a melon piece that Benjamin Franklin sent from London to his wife in 1755. He wrote her that he was sending her a box "containing some English China; viz. Melons and Leaves for a Dessert of Fruit and Cream. . ."

Useful wares predominate in this collection, and there are many organic or sculptural forms that served a useful purpose. A Chelsea dovecote, c. 1756, modeled in the round with a fox disturbing the birds in their turreted and castellated sanctuary, is an imposing and enjoyable centerpiece. An earlier Bowles gift to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, this piece is displayed in the Porcelain Gallery at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

Concurrent with Chelsea was an East London factory named Bow, also known as The Bow China Manufactory, which went so far as to label some early inkwells "Made at New Canton, 1750." In the Bowles Collection, the Bow factory is represented by a rich variety of early designs. There are delightful examples of the colorful and fetching "Quail" pattern and Kakiemon, that spare, assymetrical design which is quintessentially Japanese (it mattered very little to early collectors that their "china" sometimes favored a Japanese style). There are also the more typically Chinese designs including *blanc de chine* with sprigged prunus blossoms, in powder blue and in *famille rose*. There are a pair of small tureens in the form of a yellow-green apple with a brown, arching worm serving as a finial.

Bow porcelain is a parallel to Chelsea in many ways, but it generally comes off as a less sophisticated product. Benjamin Franklin's box of china to his wife also included ". . . a bowl remarkable for the neatness of the figures, made at Bow. . . ." It is surprising that Franklin mentioned Bow by name since, although it had become

quite a large enterprise by 1755, it did not enjoy Chelsea's prestigious name.

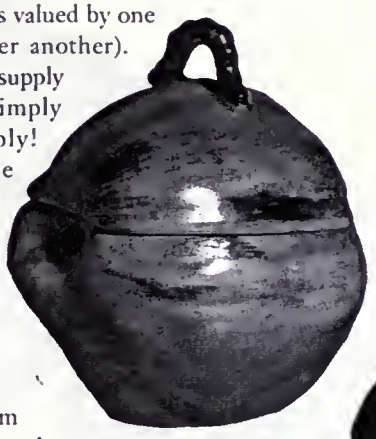
Vying with Chelsea for precedence, Bow's 1744 application for a patent predated any other such document and stated that the ceramic material was an "earth, the produce of the Chirokee *[sic]* nation in America. . . ." An American by the name of Andrew Duché discovered the "earth" for making a porcellaneous material for which Bow's director, Thomas Frye, acquired the patent. This unique American connection endears Bow to many American collectors. The ashes from oxen's bones formed a distinctive part of the Bow recipe which, although it first caused discoloration problems, became a unique English contribution to ceramic technology called "bone china."

The porcelain from Longton Hall, near Stoke-on-Trent, was extraordinary for its charm and its industry. Showing even more imperfections than Chelsea or Bow, some Longton Hall wares were produced possibly as early as 1749 under its founder, William Jenkinson. Their secrets of porcelain making may have come from London, but much mystery surrounds the origins of the Longton Hall glassy body. The Bowles Collection contains a rare pair of peach-shaped wine cups with twig handles and applied flowers. There is also a pair of leaf-molded basins and a superb teapot shaped like a melon but with vine handle and leaf-molded spout.

The work of the "Castle painter" can be seen on two dishes. One is decorated with six molded mulberry leaves forming the rim while, in the center there is a picturesque scene of a church with a castle in the background. Another smaller dish is by the same hand.

In the Longton Hall pieces, the most spectacular object is a 1756 covered tureen in the form of overlapping lettuce leaves with a tray similarly organic, all painted in realistic shades of light green. It was acquired in 1980 at the Sotheby's sale of the Nelson A. Rockefeller collection.

Worcester porcelain is probably the most popular factory for early English porcelain collectors. There is a greater abundance of "Dr. John Wall" (1st period Worcester) porcelain available than one finds from any other factory. It is uncertain whether the quantity is a sign of greater durability (it is the strongest) or of greater desirability (it is valued by one generation after another). The old law of supply and demand simply does not apply! The soapstone in Worcester's composition gave it a strength almost equal to the real (hard paste) porcelain from Meissen or from the Orient. A short-lived factory at Bristol was started in 1749 by Benjamin Lund before it was reorganized by Dr. John Wall (and 14 other proprietors) and moved to Worcester. The Bowles Collection is rich in choice Worcester specimens.



The Worcester porcelain in the Bowles Collection forms a sizeable component which is strong in quality and variety. It ranges from a rare barrel-shaped blue and white mug, c. 1750 to a colorful plate from the Duke of Gloucester service, painted in the studio of James Giles, with insects hovering over a cluster of spotted fruit, c. 1765. Many objects are of blue and white designs either printed or painted under the glaze, as well as a group in overglaze transfer print, revealing the fashions of the period. Rarely does one encounter so many examples in elegant ground colors of yellow, turquoise, claret, *bleu celeste* and apple green. The designs surrounded by ground colors are usually taken from the French in Worcester's most refined excellence. And for excellence no other English factory rivaled Worcester! There are also many delightful rarities of form. The basket-molded wine taster cup stands on three feet and sports a rustic twig handle; it is further embellished with applied foliage and flowers. There are several plates with fable scenes which, although painted apparently by the same

Above—
ORGANIC IMAGERY:
Longton Hall covered tureen, circa 1756, in the shape of overlapping lettuce leaves with a tray, all painted in realistic shades of green.

Below—
COFFEE AND TEA:
Chelsea coffee pot in *blanc de chine*, circa 1749, with tea plant design.

Opposite—
RARIFIED EXCELLENCE:
An unusual barrel-shaped blue and white mug, circa 1750.

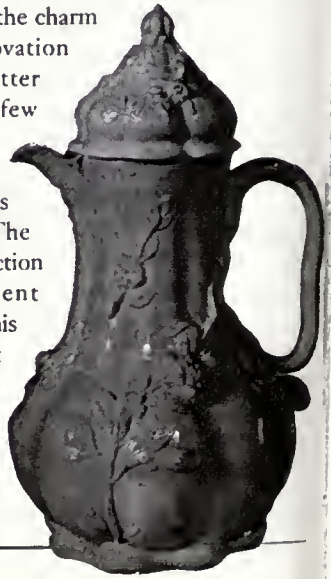
Jeffreyes Hammet O'Neale mentioned above, makes quite a different impression from that of the Chelsea.

One of a pair of dessert plates, c. 1760, shows "The Fox and the Stork," and the other portrays the fable of "The Dog and the Ox." Yet another has a gilt dentil rim and a *gros-bleu* ground encircling "The Bear and the Beehives." A sparrow-beak cream jug with a cover is also from the atelier of James Giles, showing two children in a rural landscape in the style of Tenniers. Very rare, too, is the powder blue coffee pot highlighted with gilt foliage whose handle and spout are decorated with puce scrolls. Two fan-shaped reserves contain exotic polychrome birds. A wine funnel, one of only a recorded few, is extremely rare for its form, its perfection, and its beauty. The Oriental scene is painted in delicate translucent polychrome enamels.

Unique in the Bowles Collection is a candleholder figure group with two canaries perched on a stump before a bocage of leaves and flowers, all painted in brilliant colors and standing upon a Rococo gilded base. There is a wall vase in the shape of a cornucopia which was a *tour de force* for an early issue from the Worcester factory. It is relief-molded with a rural scene of cattle, trees and buildings, and is painted in the manner of James Rogers with bouquets of flowers.

In addition to the objects discussed above, the Bowles Collection includes some rare and wonderful French porcelain from Chantilly, dating from the 1730s to the 1750s. The Chantilly was donated to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and may be viewed as a part of its permanent display. The Bowles collection also contains Meissen and Höchst in addition to other English wares from Lowestoft, Liverpool, Derby and Swansea.

In the Bowles collection, the early work holds the greatest interest. It is in the initial decades of porcelain-making that the modeler worked most freely, most inventively. If the potter imitated, it reflected his personal interpretation. After all, it was a time when every potter was an apprentice with the new material, porcelain; consequently, it was a period before he began to copy or mass-produce. For decorative purposes, a later, more finished and sophisticated product was marketed, but it lacked the charm of early innovation when the potter accepted few inhibitions by the material or to his inspiration. The Bowles Collection holds excellent pieces from this period, and it is this focus that gives the collection its unique status. ■



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THE MAKING OF A COLLECTION: MRS. CONSTANCE BOWLES HART REMEMBERS

Growing up 70 years ago on Russian Hill in San Francisco was a joyous experience. Empty lots were plentiful and reasonable rents attracted many artists, writers and bohemians. My mother was a free spirit with a great appreciation for all the arts. Many afternoons she would take me to tea at her friend's flat. She lived down the Green Street steps, and I can still see the faded green swinging gates shaped in an arch. When the gates were opened, one stood in a fragrant garden overgrown with roses, honeysuckle and lavender.

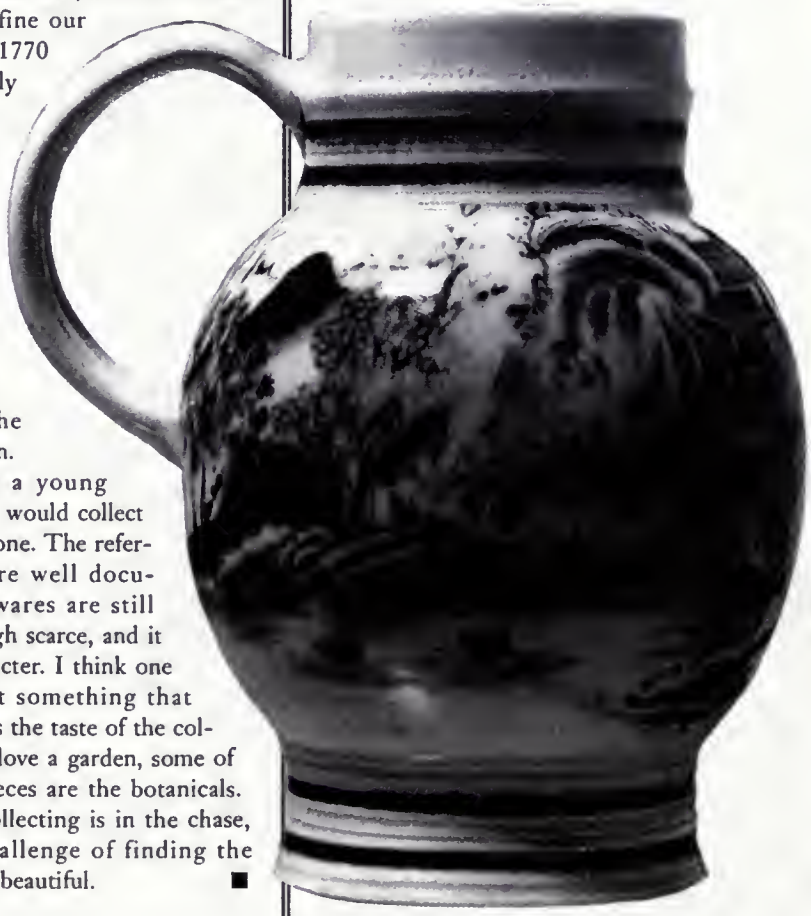
My mother's friend had no children, but a nice Persian cat. Everything in the flat seemed delicate to me, and I particularly adored her candy jar. I now think it must have been Meissen, as it was very white with raised roses and flowers all over the top. When the top came off, the jar was full of magnificent chocolate creams. Since I adored candy, the positive connection with porcelain must have been made then.

Much later in life, after I was married, browsing in antiques shops was one of my pleasures. One day I noticed a rather curious shop on Clement Street. From the moment I walked in, I was intrigued with some beautiful blue and white porcelain. The lady who waited on me explained that the powder blue pieces were English, made at Bow, circa 1765. The Chinese characters marked on the bottom were copied, but the porcelain was all English. I was completely captivated by her knowledge of porcelain which she shared with me. It was the beginning of many visits.

With the encouragement of my husband, over the next five years I bought many examples of Worcester, Chelsea and Bow. In the meantime, my husband became fascinated with the identification process, and we found ourselves spending Saturday mornings at Mrs. Ashley's famous shop on Union Street. She was another knowledgeable, giving person who taught us well. Other shops we visited were Merryvale in San Francisco and the Antique Porcelain Company on 57th Street in New York.

Some of our happiest times were spent at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; seeing their fantastic collections. Then we joined the English Ceramic Circle where we met many collectors. I particularly remember visiting the Barclays of Barclays Bank. Their collection was mostly Chelsea, and it was superb! By then we were serious collectors, and had decided we would confine our dates to 1745-1770 and collect only useful wares, no figures. Our reasoning was that these pieces represented a period of strength and struggle in England without a lot of the later ostentation.

If I were a young person today, I would collect Mason's Ironstone. The reference books are well documented, the wares are still available, though scarce, and it has great character. I think one should collect something that truly represents the taste of the collector. Since I love a garden, some of my favorite pieces are the botanicals. The lure of collecting is in the chase, and in the challenge of finding the unique and the beautiful. ■



VI THE BOWLES COLLECTION, CONTINUED

[Interview 5: February 24, 1993] ##

Caveat Emptor

Riess: Occasionally you have referred to marks, for instance talking about Henry's Chelsea beaker. How much time did you spend with the marks and the history? How important was the research on each piece? Or once you knew you were buying from someone like Winifred Williams did you not have to dig into it further?

Bowles: I think we always wanted to read about it and study it. We may not have done it as thoroughly as we might have, but we certainly did read a lot about it once we bought the piece. That was the challenge, trying to be sure of identification.

Riess: Wouldn't you have to count on the identification being correct? The dealers expect you to keep coming back.

Bowles: Oh, yes, they do, but it's up to you to find out if it's spurious, so you have to be careful. It's not an easy thing either, because sometimes the top may not match exactly, and they'll say, "Well, it doesn't really make any difference." Well, it does make a difference, it's very important, those things make all the difference. The numbers on a tureen top and bottom should be the same.

Riess: Do you take a piece home and have a couple of weeks with it to find out more about it?

Bowles: No, we never did, not really. I think we felt we wanted to be fair to the dealer and be sure. And of course, you run the risk of something happening to it if you take it home. Not many dealers will let you do that. I suppose they would for a day or

two, but I don't think they'd do it for very long. With porcelain especially, I think it's too dangerous.

Riess: But that sense of pressure to make the decision?

Bowles: It's hard. It's difficult.

Making a Choice: A Longton Hall Castle Plate

Bowles: I remember being in New York at Mr. Weinberg's shop, and it was glorious. Really, he had everything. Ours was a small part of what he had, and very minor really, because he had huge quantities of Meissen and all kinds of wonderful Sevres.

I remember being in there, and Henry finally said, "Well, I think you can buy one of the castle plates." I guess I've told you this. There were six of them on the wall, and each one was perfectly beautiful. I had to decide, which plate did I want? It was difficult. I finally made a decision. Mr. Weinberg had a nice girl there that helped me decide, because it was such a huge thing for me.

Riess: Could we find it in the book?

Bowles: Oh, yes, it's right here. It's a Longton Hall piece [Longton Hall 3]. We don't have too many pieces of Longton Hall.

I guess that's the other thing: in the collection, the Longton Hall and the Chelsea are so rare that it's more fun to talk about them.

Now, here it is, this leaf dish, "The rim formed of six molded mulberry leaves." I didn't really realize they were mulberry leaves. But the center is by the castle painter, and he is a noted painter. I don't know what his name was, but they call him the castle painter. They were so unusual, so special.

Riess: How in that moment did you decide?

Bowles: Well, I couldn't. I decided actually, I think, that I liked the darker green on the rim of the leaves. I love color, and so I think that that was just a tiny bit more colorful than the others. Probably that's what made me decide. But it was very hard. "All right, you can have one. Now pick it!" [laughs]

Riess: Was the scene the same? Or are they slightly different castles?

Bowles: They're slightly different castles, yes. But they're usually that same feeling with the background in the distance, and very nice.

Riess: Do you feel, when you're making a decision like that, that there is actually a right decision, if you could kind of get to it?

Bowles: I am conceited enough to say that I feel that there are very few decisions that I made in buying something that were a mistake. That's so strange. Of course, price has a lot to do with it, too. Here I was paying--for us, that was a huge amount of money.

Riess: How much was that, $4,000?

Bowles: That was a lot of money, I thought. It isn't today, but it seemed so much. It was such a big thing for us to do. At least, I felt it was.

Riess: I don't whether we've talked about intuition before, but is your first take often the last take? Do you think that this was the one that you said yes to initially? How much of a struggle was that?

Bowles: I think that the main thing is that if you see six, you're much more apt to have trouble deciding; but if there's only one, you wouldn't have any trouble at all. So that was the thing. I think when I was confronted with that many, it was overwhelming. I would have just loved one. And if he'd only had one, I would have taken it, if I was told that I could.

You see, I was really spending Henry's money. It was our money, but I always felt as though it was his money, and I didn't want to do anything foolish.

Riess: Did he try to separate you from that problem sometimes by simply giving you money and making it completely your decision?

Bowles: He enjoyed surprising me with presents. He loved to just buy something and give it to me. But he was never penurious about me spending money. He was very good about that. If I really wanted something, I could have it. But I really never felt it was money of my own. It's strange. And I have money of my own now, and I'm still pretty careful. I'm really careful about money, because I, as you know, was raised to be careful.

Henry was a lot more extravagant. So that was fun for me, to have someone really say, "Well, go ahead." And I think he was very wise in doing that, because I might never have done it, I might never have spent that sort of money. I probably wouldn't have. I probably would have thought it was too extravagant, even

though I really wanted it. It might have been hard for me to be so free.

Antique Porcelain Co., Purchases, and Personnel, Dickering

Bowles: This is an unusual piece, a melon teapot [Longton Hall 6]. It's rare and unusual, and I almost thought it was a little grotesque when I first saw it. But it is unique and wonderful. And this is very typical, the sort of Cos lettuce on the stand and on the spout.

Riess: That was from the Nelson Rockefeller Collection, was it not?

Bowles: This one wasn't, but the next one, the Cos lettuce tureen [Longton Hall 7] was from the Nelson Rockefeller Collection, and that was very exciting for us. To have it from a collection always adds to the interest of something. Miss Weinberg brought that out to us by hand, as a matter of fact. I think that was sold in New York [purchased from Sotheby's, 1980].

The Weinbergs had had a lot to do with Nelson Rockefeller's collecting. In fact, there was some talk that Nelson thought Miss Weinberg was very attractive, which she is, and that she and her father were really at loggerheads over who was going to influence Nelson Rockefeller to buy this piece or that piece, because her father was a very strong personality.

Riess: Miss Weinberg is Rotrant Beiny?

Bowles: Yes, and her husband is a dentist. She was very chic. She's older now, but she was really lovely.

Mr. Weinberg was always very careful to have a beautiful girl in the shop as a saleslady, not only beautiful but knowledgeable. And for a time, in fact, do you know Joan Quigley? You've heard about Joan Quigley, who was the astrologer for Nancy Reagan? She worked in his shop, and she was pretty and bright.

They had to know everything. If they didn't he would practically hit them. [laughs] He treated them rather rudely, I thought. But that shop, it was overwhelming. There's never been anything like it. We were just terrified when we first went in, because it was so much. The girl would help you in a dignified way.

Riess: The girls were not haughty?

Bowles: No, no. They were nice, not what you'd call extremely friendly. They were distant but knowledgeable. Then if they thought you were at all serious they'd call for Mr. Weinberg. He was in the back room.

[written by Mrs. Bowles before this interview] Our first purchase of a piece from the Longton Hall factory was in 1968. It was also our first trip to the Antique Porcelain Company on 57th Street between Fifth and Madison in New York City. A dream come true, it was full of every type of porcelain and a feast of beauty.

Fortunately Mr. Weinberg was there, a lively and delightful person who showed us around. Since we knew we wanted to broaden our collection we were looking for a piece of Longton Hall. A pair of Longton Hall basins [Longton Hall 1] caught our attention, and a pair is always more sought after than a single piece. Somehow we expected Mr. Weinberg to be open to a bit of dickering, but though we tried every method, he was not to be budged as to price. Our children were waiting for us at our New York hotel and couldn't believe we could be an hour late, as we were notoriously punctual. [end written addition]

In a back room he had a black short-wave light which, if there are any repairs, they show up on the piece. So he'd take out the black light and turn out all the lights, and we'd look, and there were no repairs. It was a very sort of mysterious business. It was quite exciting.

Those Longton Hall basins we bought from Mr. Weinberg for $3,000. We tried to get him down $2,500, but he would not go below $3,000. Now that I think about it, the poor man probably didn't make any profit at all.

Riess: Was Henry good at that kind of thing?

Bowles: Pretty good. I was really much better at it, because I felt that it was a lot of money. Henry was the kind of person that if he really wanted something, he'd buy it. He wasn't going to stand around and dicker over it.

But in this case, it was so much that we felt we had to. [laughs] No, he didn't like doing that especially. When he was in the swing of it, he was pretty good at it, but it was more my feeling that we should dicker, because I've always heard that you should. I think we both were used to doing that. We started out, "Well, could you make a better price?" in sort of a trembling voice, and then we were rather tough about it.

Riess: And it must have been just a little--in the beginning, you have to have been somewhat naive. I know you're not now, but that's such a strange feeling, because you'd like to be able to trust your fellow man, and salesman.

Bowles: I know.

Riess: Were you sent to Mr. Weinberg by someone?

Bowles: Well, in the beginning of our buying, when we'd exhausted San Francisco--one always heard about the Antique Porcelain Company, and everybody would say, "Oh! You wouldn't even think of going there, it's much too expensive!" We'd say, "Of course not, oh, no."

But we couldn't wait to go there, because we'd heard so much about it. It was just another step along the way. We were never frightened by the idea. If you didn't want to buy something, you didn't have to buy it. I think a lot of people won't even go into a shop that they think is too expensive. That's so silly, because why not go and look? It's not going to cost them anything, and it certainly isn't going to cost you anything.

I always thought we had a lot of courage about that. We didn't feel put down by anyone. So what?

Riess: I guess there are always purchasers for the really fine pieces when they come up? Is that the idea?

Bowles: I have found there are, yes. When we started, of course, there was quite a bit around, and we weren't used to spending much money. But as you see, if you let something go, it's gone the next day even. That's it. So then you get a little wiser, and you know that there's not going to be that much around.

The Real Article, and an Aside on Nelson Rockefeller

Riess: I've been talking to someone who was involved with one of the first Asian art societies in the Bay Area, and she has said that the reason they formed is because there were so many unscrupulous dealers in Oriental art. People wanted to have a kind of network and a sort of self-educating experience.

Bowles: That is true. The more I see of the market of porcelain and paintings and all the rest of it, I think because there are more people in the world now, and because everything's more in demand,

that there are also more people that are delighted to say, "That is not the real article."

We had it happen recently at the museum [Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, see p. 118]. I think that because there are so many more people around wanting to show that something might be counterfeit, there are a lot more people saying that. I think that's bad, too. Because they may not be right. It's a difficult thing to identify a lot of these things, extremely difficult.

Riess: Have any of your pieces been called into question?

Bowles: No. None that I've given to museums, certainly. I have one piece that they still argue about. I've had dealers come, and one of them said, "Absolutely that is wrong," and somebody else came and said, "If that isn't Longton Hall, I'll eat my hat." I just keep the piece out. I'm never going to give it to anyone because it's questioned.

Riess: Is it here?

Bowles: No. I don't think I have a picture of it here. Yes, I do. It's right here. We have no appraisal on it. We bought it for Longton Hall.

Riess: Longton Hall 8, tulip-leaf patterned cream jug, bought from Christie's. And what do they take issue with?

Bowles: Bob Williams just says, "It is not Longton Hall. It is not at all." These dealers are so clever, he may have had it himself at one time, or he knows that piece because he'd seen it at auction at one time. I don't know what the reason is, and he's not going to tell me. He just says, "That is not what it claims to be."

And then I had another dealer come, Kate Foster, who is supposed to be knowledgeable, from London. I showed it to her and she said, "Well, I don't think he knows what he's talking about."

Riess: So they get into a competition.

Bowles: Between them, you see, and so that's something you don't want to do either. I just said, "Well, I'll leave it out." I have the picture there, but I know we're not going to include it in the catalogue. That makes it interesting, in a way, but you wouldn't want it to happen very often. [laughs]

Riess: Did you meet Nelson Rockefeller along the way as a collector?

Bowles: Unfortunately, no. I would love to have met him. I think he must have been an interesting man.

He was interested in Chinese export, as I understood it. He built, in fact, an Oriental house in upper New York State. I understand that it's absolutely beautiful. He built the house without consulting his wife--not that she cared, and really I have no idea whether she did or didn't, she was his second wife, and wasn't very interested anyway, and so he was perfectly free to do what he wanted. Apparently he made every decision on the house and loved doing it. He was that kind of a man, aesthetically oriented, you might say.

Riess: He was behind a shop in New York that sold only reproduction art, and was very controversial.

Bowles: Yes, it was. I went there, and I looked at the things very carefully. The point I found interesting was that it was still impossible for him to reproduce porcelain. That's one thing that is extremely difficult to do.

He did very well with the Remington bronzes. From what I've seen of the Remingtons, they were much easier to do. Maybe a bronze expert would say I was wrong. But as far as the porcelain went, I think you could have told it a mile away.

He was doing that, as I understood it, so other people could enjoy the porcelain that he had been lucky enough to buy, and he wanted to reproduce it so that they would be happy with it.

Riess: He was reproducing Chinese export?

Bowles: Mostly Chinese export.

Riess: Did he try for any of the English porcelains?

Bowles: No. I was always disappointed he didn't.

Riess: This melon teapot [Longton Hall 7], have you done any research on it?

Bowles: No, not really.

There are people that collect teapots, and I have a book on the subject written by Frank Tilley [London, 1957]. Some of them are whimsical and pretty amazing, so I guess they were trying to keep up with that whole theme.

Riess: Didn't the Japanese and Chinese do somewhat whimsical pots?

Bowles: Yes, they certainly did. But I wouldn't think Meissen would have done anything unusual--they did more the decorative outside painting--which makes that an interesting piece.

Riess: Your Longton Hall group is very special.

Bowles: It really is, because the factory only lasted for ten years, and there are only very few pieces. You don't see much of it, so that makes it quite special.

These are charming, these wine taaters [Longton Hall 5], just wonderfully painted inside. So delightful. They were supposed to be a peach shape, and people used wine tasters just as they do today. It's interesting to have a pair, too.

This shape is similar to K'ang Hsi bridal cups. That's kind of unusual. It would be interesting some day to go back and look at Chinese pieces, or even Japanese pieces, to see how they did copy them. They copied many of the shapes.

Riess: You started buying Longton Hall in 1968, and in 1977 you bought the last piece.

Bowles: We did it gradually.

An Afternoon in Bury St. Edmunds

Bowles: I was talking to Bob Williams only yesterday, and he said, "There's just nothing on the market. There's nothing coming at all." That isn't good. Anyway, that's the way it is.

Riess: On those shopping trips, when you were holed up at Claridge's--that's where you stayed?

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: --and were circling around the antique stores, did you find other individuals that you kept running into? Did you begin to feel that you were perhaps bidding against or buying against people?

Bowles: No, I never really have met many people that were buying. It was more that the dealers became our friends. These people are mysterious, people that are collectors, they sometimes don't have even a very nice place to live, and they'll buy a piece of porcelain because they are peculiar enough to do that. There are collectors just like that. They want to do it, they want to buy,

and they don't want to be known. They don't want people to know who they are.

So no, we never really met any collectors except those people who were famous--the Barclays of Barclays' Bank. Did I tell you about going out there? He had one of the finest collections I have ever seen. I didn't know who Mr. Barclay was until we got out there! He was an older man, and he had a room full of porcelain. It was beautiful, and I think they've kept it in the family in England.

Riess: Did you meet him through the ceramic circle?

Bowles: I met him through Bernard Watney, who's going to do a little introduction to our book. Bernard said, "You've got to meet them." We went out there at 12:00. Bury St. Edmunds is a little town outside of London, and we hired a car and a driver and went out there.

We thought we'd stay an hour and have lunch, but we did not leave there until 6:30 that night. Henry is not a person to ever stay anywhere very long, at a party or anything. But we were fascinated by them. They were so intriguing, and they liked everything we liked. They walked us around their farm--they liked to go pheasant shooting--it was just a great experience. They were quite a lot older than we were, but we had such a good time, we couldn't leave!

And his collection, as I say, was just fantastic. He particularly liked the Chelsea fable plates. He had dozens of them.

Riess: How did he keep his collection?

Bowles: It was all in cabinets the way ours is, with the lights and the glass doors. And he kept a very careful record of all of his pieces. He enjoyed it so much. He really loved doing it. And here he was, I guess president of Barclays' Bank, was rather impressive! [laughs]

Riess: That was a wonderful introduction. Did you see them every time you went to England?

Bowles: No, we didn't. We must have arrived there on a very good day, because shortly afterwards he was ill. They were quite old. Then he died, and she had a terrible fall, so we really never--I'm sorry that we didn't keep in touch with them. I think we felt we had stayed so long, we should never call them again!

Riess: But you say now that collection stayed in the family.

Bowles: It has.

Riess: It didn't go into a museum.

Bowles: Not that I know of. No one seems to know. I've asked Bernard and he's a little vague about it.

Riess: Probably everyone prays that it will be broken up and sold for taxes.

Bowles: Exactly. People keep track of it.

Riess: Does the queen have a collection?

Bowles: The queen mother is supposed to have a wonderful collection of Chelsea botanicals. I've heard that she has some beautiful ones. but unfortunately she hasn't invited me for tea, so I haven't been to see them.

I don't think the Queen Elizabeth is interested--she is a horsey-doggy kind of person. But I think that the queen mother does have these Chelsea plates. Maybe she'll sell them some day when she's hard up! [laughter]

Riess: It seems to me that day is coming.

Bowles: Pretty fast, yes. But I've never had the opportunity to see them. I would love to.

Bernard Watney, The English Ceramic Circle, and Fellow Collectors

Riess: You referred once to "at last" being accepted in the English Ceramic Circle. That is where you met Bernard Watney?

Bowles: Yes, it was, because he's been president of the English Ceramic Circle for many years.

Riess: What did you have to do to get in? I know you said earlier that Mrs. Faulkner made it sound impossible. [See p. 79]

Bowles: Finally what did happen? We were introduced to John Mallet and Bernard Watney, and I guess they put in a good word. That's how we got in. You had to be a very serious collector, and you could not be a dealer, they were very much against dealers.

There's a big distinction between museum people and dealers, and they like museum people, directors and so forth, but they certainly don't want any dealers because they're afraid they'll make the thing commercial. It still goes on. It's so English, it's very funny. We've never been to a tea party or anything like that, but I think they have them. It's $25 a year, and people write in and ask questions.

But the English Ceramic Circle is very scholarly. I've kept all of the Transactions, as they call them, because people come and give papers. It's a very serious thing. For example, Bernard Watney is the most charming man, he has a great sense of humor, he's lots of fun, he loves wine, he loves food and everything, but when he starts to talk porcelain, he gets very technical.

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Riess: Do men who are collectors get more interested in the clays and so on?

Bowles: Yes, the technical and the chemical part, all that. They're much more interested in it than a woman, I think. But that's just a man's point of view.

Riess: You said in your notes that gradually you met collectors from Seattle and Tennessee. Tennessee?

Bowles: A man I never met called me and wanted to come here. It was a time when I was very busy and I couldn't see him. That's another thing that happens. People call you out of the blue because they've heard that you are a collector. He sounded delightful, but I've never caught up with him again. He was from Memphis. He gave me his name, and I have it written down somewhere. I don't know what's happened to him. I never bothered to look him up because I never went to Memphis.

In the South, in places like Atlanta and Charleston, there probably are more people that are interested, because it's kind of a--well, because the English came over and brought porcelain with them, and were living in the South, in Virginia, Charleston, places like that.

Riess: And I've read that clays were sent to England from South Carolina.

Bowles: That's right. So there really is more of a connection on the East Coast than in the West.

Riess: Particularly if you had some pieces already in your family.

Bowles: Exactly. That's very true.

Riess: Have you met people that came by it naturally? [laughs]

Bowles: Not too many, no. I really haven't. I guess we're too Western. [laughter] Maybe if I knew someone in Charleston I might find out. I think that with Raymond [Yarbrough], there may have been a few pieces in his family. I think that's how he started. But no, absolutely not. We had none.

Chantilly

Bowles: I had the most difficult time, because Antique Porcelain Company had a plate, beautifully done but not terribly exciting. At the same time they had a wonderful little Chantilly tureen, and it even had the saucer and the ladle.

The pieces were both about the same price. I was told by Henry that I could have one or the other, and right then and there I had to decide! I thought, "I better stay with what I'm doing, because although I've been very tempted by the French, after all, we are collecting English, and I've tried to stay within this boundary. So I should get this."

Later I found in Paris a similar tureen with the stand, and it was Chantilly. I've given it to the museum. We had five of the most charming pieces of French soft paste that are there now. That was almost the first thing I gave, because originally the museum had said they really only wanted French things.

Since they were French, and there are almost no pieces of Chantilly around--that's really rare--I thought, well, I'll give them those, and that will be that. But I always remember the choice between this Longton Hall plate and the Chantilly tureen. And that then it all worked out and I bought the tureen too. [laughs] So I guess I've been fortunate.

Balancing the Shooting with the Porcelain

Riess: In the beginning the intention of your trips to England was not shopping for porcelain, I take it. I assume that you were over there for something else?

Bowles: We were over there to go grouse shooting. We'd go for shooting lessons every day, out to the West London Shooting School, which is pretty glamorous, and then come back and have lunch at some marvelous restaurant with a bottle of wine. And by that time it was 3:00, and you didn't have too much time to go look for porcelain. Life was just very full, and we didn't have all the time in the world.

It made a wonderful balance, because you weren't always being enthused about a gun, or out taking shooting lessons, because that can be kind of tiring also. It's very tiring, shooting.

Riess: Was there a pack of friends that you were doing that with?

Bowles: Oh, yes. We always met a group of friends. They were never interested in the porcelain, so they'd have their friends or do their thing, and we'd do ours.

I've always felt so very fortunate about that, because you were never at loose ends. There's always something to do, and there's always something that interests you. You don't have to say to somebody, "Well, where should I go tomorrow, or where should I go this afternoon?" You always knew where you were going or what you were looking for. I think it's very important, to always have a feeling of where you're going or what you're looking for. Because it's kind of hopeless just wandering around sightseeing.

Riess: That part of London, Sotheby's and Christie's are there, too?

Bowles: Yes, but we never went to Sotheby's and Christie's. Usually the auctions weren't on, and we didn't want to sit around in auction rooms waiting for something to buy. We relied on Mr. Weinberg or even Mr. Williams to buy for us, because we didn't have that kind of time to sit around in an auction house all day, or a couple of hours even.

Riess: Mr. Weinberg would handle purchases with both houses?

Bowles: Yes, either house. He would just cover them, and he had people he could send. It was a very nice way to do it, because we never had that sort of time, or maybe we never felt we had that sort of time. I suppose we might have. But it was much more satisfactory, and also he was such an expert that he would give us a full report of what the condition was of the piece.

As I say, in those early days they were never compelled to give you condition. The auction house didn't have to mention it. Now in the auction catalogues they pretty much do have to tell

you. But you still aren't sure, and you never know about the color, whether it's really what you want. So we began to rely on him a lot.

Bob Williams also bought for us at auction, and they had very good people.

Amor Ltd., Mrs. George

Bowles: In London the little area that we went to was No. 6 Bury Street, and that's right off Jermyn Street in St. James's. There were the two shops, Bob Williams, and then across the way is Amor, who is still there. Mrs. [Anne] George, her name is, but the shop was called Amor Ltd.--the original owner's name. She is a wonderful person, and I've bought some things from her.

Riess: How was it different to be dealing with a woman? A handsome young man out front?

Bowles: [laughs] No, and she had a very tiny shop. But she was lively and interesting--still is--and very knowledgeable. She also would give you a little break on the price. That was fun. I always go to her shop now when I'm in London, because she has the only shop left. She buys collections, and she'll tell me about it. She won't tell me who the people are, but somebody will come in and she'll buy their whole collection and then sell it. I think she's extremely smart.

Riess: Does she get out a catalogue?

Bowles: Once in a while. She doesn't call it a catalogue, she calls it an exhibition, and some of the pieces are for sale. But you have to call her and find out which ones they are. She's very careful about it. It's very well done. It's never commercial in any way. It's just a very subtle way of doing things.

Riess: Does she have to protect people's privacy because it indicates that one is perhaps on their uppers to sell a collection?

Bowles: I think that might be part of it, yes. Or for whatever reason, maybe somebody died. And there's a lot of privacy about it, yes, and there's a lot of muttering and worrying. Although if it's a collection, and it says the collection, then that adds to the value of the piece. At least it makes it more interesting.

Riess: Because it has a pedigree.

Bowles: Yes, it has a pedigree. They often put a little sticker on it. One of my beakers had a sticker on it indicating the collector's name. Yes, that adds a lot.

For example, the last plate that I bought had a small red anchor on it. I thought it was a big decision. The girl that sold it to me had worked for Mrs. George--Amor Ltd.--and where she picked up this piece I have no idea. I ask no questions, but that's the way it was. I think the salespeople who work for dealers are out for themselves. They're all pretty slick.

Traders, Upgraders, Keepers, and Defining the Collection

Riess: With all the flea markets in London, would it be beyond hope that something would turn up there?

Bowles: I always thought I might find something there. Henry would never go to those things, but I would. I even went with Jim Hart, and I was sure I might find something. It is almost impossible to find anything at those that's very good, because now people know.

It's the same thing with stamps. I always said to Henry, "The thousands of stamps there are, wouldn't you think somebody would find in old Aunt Jessie's trunk some wonderful rare stamp that was upside down?" It almost never happened. It's because there are people out there that are combing, just combing, all the time. They don't have to know very much, they don't have to have much money. But they're combing, and then maybe upgrading, and trading back and forth.

Raymond just the other day amazed me. He bought something, and then he sold a whole lot of things at auction. Well, he didn't tell me that he was going to sell them at auction. Maybe I would have been interested, I don't know, maybe I wouldn't. People do that, and they never tell you. Never. [laughs]

It is curious. It happens with fishing rods, really good rods, they trade them around. And sometimes finally, as somebody said, they get the first rod back that they started out with! It's the trading idea that people love. I don't happen to like that. I don't like trading. I don't want to part with anything.

Everybody says--I've told you this [see p. 115-116]--"Why don't you upgrade the collection, get rid of the things that you don't really care about?" Well, I wouldn't have bought anything if I didn't care about it, and I don't care to upgrade it, because

as soon as I did, I'd miss that piece. I know I'd miss it. So even if it's only blue and white or whatever it is, I don't want to.

Ed Schwartz has asked me a couple of times, he said, "You don't collect blue and white. Why don't you let me buy that teapot from you?" Well, it goes right out of my head. I wouldn't think of it. I know I'd miss it.

Riess: Raymond Yarbrough said that for you and Henry collecting was a one-way street.

Bowles: It was, that's true, absolutely. But I think the trading is the kick other people get out of it. I don't like it. I don't think it's a whole lot of fun.

Now, this is an unusual piece here, this blue and white piece [Chelsea 12] Very, very rare. It's the only known, and I mean only known, blue and white piece of Chelsea ever made. The only other place anyone's ever seen one is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It's so beautifully balanced--the design, everything, ties in in a very, very special way. It's an extremely rare piece, really more beautiful than any of the blue and white Worcester.

When you study it, and look at the balance of that piece, it's just remarkable, because so many blue and white things are rather monotonous. This diaper edging--they call it a trellis diaper border, interspersed with Oriental flowers. But it really is very exciting.

Riess: And that bird? What is it?

Bowles: The phoenix, they say. That is really a very unusual piece.

Riess: Where did you buy that?

Bowles: We bought it at Sotheby's [1969] for $1270. We were thrilled to get it. I'm not sure that Mr. Weinberg had anything to do with it, but he may have. He often advised us. He'd say, "Well, now, you know, you really ought to have that in your collection," or "You should have this." That made it wonderful for us, because he wasn't just selling us any old thing.

Riess: Did Mr. Weinberg have a sense of the definition of your collection in 1969?

Bowles: Only from the point of view that Henry in the beginning, because he had been a stamp collector, said, "The most interesting

collections are the ones that have a very narrow field of years, and we will keep it within those years and not be tempted by anything to the side or otherwise." It's like the stamps: if you collect stamps, you should collect only U.S. stamps, and certain years, the early years, are the only good ones, and after that, they're really not that valuable.

From the very beginning we thought it would be a collection. I really in a way made Henry give up his stamps, because he wanted to be with me and collect what I wanted, and I didn't find stamps very exciting. Oh, they are, but they didn't interest me especially. It was very sweet of him to do that. He consciously did that, and I really hadn't realized it. I was so enthused I thought, "Of course, everybody is going to like doing what I'm doing!" I think he realized it was something that would be fun for both of us.

A Gap, "Girl in a Swing"

Riess: For a museum-goer, is the Bowles Collection a definite slice through time? Are there any real holes?

Bowles: Yes, there is one hole that I'm working on now. We are missing a piece of "Girl in a Swing." "Girl in a Swing" was a very early factory, and a girl in a swing is the model that they used. Not many people have a piece--there are only a few pieces around.

By chance, I thought, "I wonder if Miss Weinberg"--Mr. Weinberg's daughter, who is going back into business--"happens to have a piece?" I called her, and she has two pieces, but they are blanc-de-Chine. I spoke to Raymond about it, and it's way more than we can afford.

Then when I talked to Bob Williams he said, "You know, museum-goers really are more interested in polychrome pieces than they are in the blanc-de-Chine." I feel that way about blanc-de-Chine, too, I've always felt that blanc-de-Chine looks unfinished. It takes a certain sophistication, I guess, to like it. I still don't especially like it. I have it, I accept it, but it's not my favorite thing.

Bob Williams said to me the other day, "Connie, hold off, because that piece is very expensive, and I may be able to find you a piece of polychrome 'Girl in a Swing.' So I'm counting on him to come up with something, but I don't know whether he will or

not. If he doesn't, maybe we will buy a piece of the blanc-de-Chine.

Riess: He knows someone who's really ready to sell?

Bowles: That's the whole point, and he would not tell me, naturally. Why would he tell me who the person is? He's not going to tell me, but he will be calling that man.

[interruption while tea is served]

Bob said to me the other day on the telephone, "Do you remember that little snuff bottle that I wanted you to buy?" I do remember it, and I thought it was just outrageously expensive, and I didn't buy it, but it was a piece of "Girl in a Swing," and he remembers that. [laughs] So I don't know what he's going to come up with now.

Riess: Tell me what we're drinking tea from.

Bowles: This is Herend, and my favorite pattern in the whole wide world. It's called the yellow imperial.

The Klepser Collection

Riess: Here is the Klepser Collection catalogue, and it's beautifully done.

Bowles: These people collected only Worcester. I think it's a very nice catalogue, very nice.

Riess: In the back are letters from Mr. Klepser to the dealer Leonard Crow. Do you have letters that you and Henry wrote?

Bowles: Letters? I have a lot of letters, yes. But apparently Mr. Klepser was writing to his dealer all the time. No, we don't have a whole lot of letters like that.

Riess: Any letters that you've written immediately after the purchase and describing it to someone?

Bowles: One of the best letters I have is a letter Henry wrote in 1977, and I've kept it because I thought it said exactly what I feel right now [appended]. But for letters to the dealers, we did it mostly by telephone. I have a lot of bills and descriptions.

Bear and Beehive Plate

Riess: I think that today before I leave, we ought to get over the emotional hump of the bear and beehive plate. [referring to Mrs. Bowles tears thinking about her first sight of the bear and beehive plate, Worcester 81]

Bowles: I'm like that. When you know me, you'll know that's the way it is. I guess I am pretty emotional. And for me, crying is very simple. [laughter] It's not a big thing. When I cry--I often get tears in my eyes over the simplest things. I guess I've always been like that and I probably always will be, so don't let it alarm you.

The plate depicts the fable of the bear and the beehive. That's what they say here. So there must be some fable about the bear and the beehive which I don't know. I guess what happened was, I saw it at Bob Williams'. Later I saw another one come up at Sotheby's--unless Bob Williams put it in the collection, I don't know. But we bought it from Sotheby's, and bought it for a little less than Bob was offering in his store. Because we were always very conscious of the price of things. That made a big difference.

Riess: Was it also unique?

Bowles: I think there are others, but I had never seen one before.

I was just overwhelmed by it, because Bob had lined all of the backs of his cabinets with a bright red silk. And this dark blue against the bright red silk was just incredibly beautiful. I just thought, "Oh--." I will always remember how it looked. That's what I was really trying to say, I will never forget it.

And of course, to own it someday was exciting. I think what happened was the following year it came up at auction, or a couple of years later. We said, "There's that plate!" And so we got it.

Riess: Would it have been the same one?

Bowles: You never know. Bob Williams is not going to tell me that he put it up for auction. No, you never know. I've never seen another one, though, let me put it that way. It's unique. It is pictured in a big, beautiful old book I have upstairs. It's considered a top piece, really one of the best.

Riess: When Simon Spero writes about a piece like that he's going to come to a point where it goes from one hand to another and then appears somewhere else. You're saying that it was in Bob Williams' shop, and then a year later at Sotheby's? Do they try, when writing about the history of a piece, to trace those sales?

Bowles: To trace its background? Well, it's difficult to do.

I never looked at that plate without being thrilled. It was the color, the whole way it was done. I think it's marvelous, besides, being humorous. How can you get a combination like that? It's like the Chelsea dovecote. It's not really very pretty, but it's humorous. The combination of humor and beauty is the best combination. And the painting is done by O'Neale--they say they imagine it is--and he was a great artist.

Everything about it is just my idea of a perfect Worcester piece, the best. [laughs] I can't be enthusiastic enough, because I love it. I really do.

Wine Funnel, Candle Holders, and a Worcester Teapot

Bowles: Now, this wine funnel [Worcester 78] is extremely rare. I think it's interesting. I don't think it's as exciting, but it's very exciting to collectors, because a wine funnel you just don't see every day. I doubt if there were very many of them ever made. I think we paid a huge price for that--$6,000, even in 1976, was an awful lot of money, because of its rarity.

Our original idea was to only buy what we thought were considered useful wares, I believe I've told you. We didn't want anything that was just decorative. We wanted something we hoped that people had used, and I think that we succeeded in that quite well. You can imagine people using most of these pieces.

Riess: What about these candle holders [Worcester 76]?

Bowles: Well, yes, somebody could have used that. You could have had a candle in there. And that's one of my granddaughter Amanda's favorite pieces. When she was just a little girl and she'd come for dinner, I'd say to her, "Now, what's your favorite piece, Amanda?" and she'd say, "The canaries."

Riess: Tell me about getting that. Had you seen the piece before it was purchased?

Bowles: Yes, we did. It might have been better if we'd been able to get a pair, but we didn't. Only four others are recorded, one at the Dyson Perrins, but none with the original candle holder. Yes, we saw that at Winifred Williams', at Bob Williams' shop. We'd never had a figurine, but now maybe we were weakening, and that was the closest thing we really ever bought to a figurine.

I now wish we had bought more of them. But they were very expensive, and they were way beyond us. We really couldn't even think of branching into that. But this was an exception, I must say. And of course, yellow ground is very sought after, and so we always, if we saw a piece of yellow ground, that was important to add.

This is the Blind Earl plate [Worcester 71]. This is not as rare as some of the collection. I think there are quite a few of these plates around. You have to be careful of copies, too. They're a fairly easy plate to copy, because the pattern is so distinct. I've seen a lot of recent copies, but even so, in buying them, you have to be careful. I thought it was important to have it, because it's a well-known pattern, and that's important. I think it's charming, really.

That teapot [Worcester 70]--.

Riess: Yes, from Ginsburg and Levy, who were they?

Bowles: They were quite a nice antique shop on Madison Avenue in New York. They sold 18th-century English furniture. They were considered good, but they went out of business. Oftentimes they'd have pieces of English porcelain in with the furniture, because it seemed appropriate. It was porcelain that Mr. Levy had around the shop, and he was selling it because he didn't really care about it much.

Henry was very much of an acquirer. I felt after a few pieces that maybe we really didn't need any more. But oh no, he had to have that. And it was a pretty good buy at that. I couldn't be particularly thrilled over it, but I think it's very nice. And now it looks wonderful.

Henry never thought he had enough. It was always something more that he needed, had to have. And this is an interesting example, because the shagreen, as they call it, looks like egg roe, fish roe. That's a very typical thing for Worcester to do. You may not see those too often now. It's an eight-sided teapot. That's interesting. And it's a very nice example. We bought it for $750, and that's reasonable.

The thing that's interesting about teapots in Worcester is that when you look closely at the spout, it's usually on planes. In other words, there are about six planes that form that spout. Then when you look inside the teapot, there are five holes. There are always just five holes to keep the tea from going through the spout. They usually have a flower knop like that. The handles are pretty much the same, too, so that you can tell immediately by looking at it that it's Worcester. All those little things, those little minor details, make the difference.

Perfection

Riess: I made a note here about Worcester 73, a very inexpensive bowl from Klaber and Klaber.

Bowles: I think they're still in London. I haven't been back there. It was a little shop right across from Harrod's, and we went in there and bought this piece. It's quite interesting, not very expensive, but polychrome design, chinoiserie. It's a typical copy of a Chinese pattern, but Europeanized.

Riess: Has that increased greatly in value?

Bowles: Not really. As you know, the things that are less expensive never increase in value the way that the better things do, and that's why Mr. Weinberg always said, "Buy the best that you can possibly afford," and I think it's very good advice, because it's good advice in any field, but particularly in porcelain.

Riess: Raymond Yarbrough has good things to say about you all in that respect. He talked about a Chelsea O'Neale fable plate [Chelsea 27]. He bought a cracked one, you bought a perfect one. His cracked one was $400, now worth $500. Your perfect one was $750, now worth $12,000, plus 35 percent.

Bowles: I know. It's amazing. It's really true, though. You hear that from other people, and I think it is true. You stretch a point, but you should always do it, but it's not always so easy to do.

Riess: Have you ever bought a flawed piece just because of loving it greatly?

Bowles: Oh, well, I would say that we've tried to buy perfect pieces, but some of the pieces do have--they have fire cracks, or something happened in the firing where the glaze isn't quite right. We've by and large tried to stay with things that were perfect, but it's

not always easy to do. It's amazing how things sell at auction with all kinds of things wrong with them: cracks, repairs.

Riess: And certain kinds of repairs--

Bowles: Makes a difference.

Riess: In a stamp collection, sometimes that adds to its value. But in porcelains it doesn't?

Bowles: It doesn't really, no. I say, "Well, that's a crack." They say, "Oh, that's only a fire crack." You see, that's supposed to be all right if it's a fire crack, because that means it happened when it was made. I'm always very leery of that. But if you want something badly enough you buy it anyway, because you may never see it again. You may never see that pattern, and you want it, so you say, "Well, it's got a flaw but I'll take it."

It was interesting, when our things were out at the museum several of my friends went out to see them. Apparently, they really examined them pretty closely and they came back and they said, "You know, we saw one of those plates that had a little chip in it!" Really! And the whole idea is that you're not supposed to have those chips repaired, because it will show under an ultraviolet light where the repair was made.

And also, if there's a chip it just shows that it was quite old, and it isn't just perfect, and it was used. But there are all different schools of thought on that. And now apparently, they've perfected repairs so well that even with a special light you can't tell if something is repaired.

Riess: That's insidious, isn't it?

Bowles: That is, it really is. The feeling is that it was better not to try to repair things, because they should stand up the way they are. And I like them better that way, too. Part of the charm of English 18th-century porcelain is its flaws--as you know, the potters were trying to copy Meissen--and the artist would cover a mistake with a small leaf or flower.

Riess: Is anyone selling good pieces in San Francisco now?

Bowles: Not that I know of. There's a little place down on Jackson Square. But they really don't have anything. I don't look any more. Isn't that awful? Well, I look if I'm down there, but I don't go out of my way to look, because mostly they don't have much.

Collectors are Born

Riess: Are any of your grandchildren or even your children sufficiently interested that you have set them to collecting?

Bowles: My daughter Bea is quite interested. I've tried to give the children pieces of ironstone. But no, I don't think they will be collectors as Henry and I were. And of course, I think it's much more fun to collect your own things. I really do.

No, I don't see any of them being interested. They are all quite interested in books, and of course, we did collect books for a long time. I think Philip has a nice collection of books. But I think that their priorities will be quite different, I really do. I don't think they'll--. We like to live in a very comfortable style, and they live nicely, but I don't think they'll ever want to live the way we have.

Henry came with a lot of grand things from his grandparents, and they had lost a great deal of money. So it was a nice feeling for me to feel that we were living up to those things, those beautiful books, and all the things that he enjoyed. I don't think they'll come with that much baggage. That will be maybe a good thing. Incidentally, I am a great believer in keeping everything you own in top condition.

My grandchildren have been exposed to a lot of things, and they've heard talk about porcelain until they're tired of it. [laughs] But I think a collector is born. I don't see it yet, but maybe as they go along--. Malcolm is only nine. He's a collector of sorts, in a way, and very precise. It will be interesting. I can't wait to see if it happens.

I think it was just a stroke of luck, a real stroke of luck, that Henry and I were so well suited, both feeling the same way. I don't know where you'd find anything like that again. It is hard for a single person to be a collector, I think. It's much more fun and much more alive to be with somebody else, collecting. To totally share is an expression of love. We enjoyed it all, the fishing, hunting, skiing together, and so collecting together seemed natural. Whether they're lucky enough to find someone like that, I don't know. It would be fun to see. I hope I'm around for it.

The Bowles Collection of Paintings

Riess: And what about the paintings that are here?

Bowles: Henry and I bought that together, because we were in New York, and we love to fish on the New Jersey shore on the Atlantic Seaboard. We'd go up surf casting. When we saw that, it reminded us of it, and so we bought that. It's done by a Philadelphia artist, Stumpfig.

Now, this painting is quite interesting. It belonged to Henry's grandmother, and he brought it with him. He said that his grandmother had bought it in Paris, and it had won a prize. When I was young, I said, "Well, that may be, but I am not hanging that awful thing in my house."

I put it in the basement, and it was there for quite a few years until I developed a few brains. I brought it up, and I adore it, absolutely love it. It turns out that it's a fairly good artist, not really very well-known, but at least known. Victor Gilbert. He painted many French genre pictures. It is sweet, isn't it? He's sort of second-tier, I guess, but he's quite good.

And these two Audubon pictures came from Henry's grandmother. Here's an example--. I wasn't too crazy about them, but we had them, and they were a pair, and they fit well. Jim Hart came into my life, and he walked over to them and he said, "These are not very good. They're not the first pressing," or whatever he said. I was furious, and he said, "They're not really the top."

So there's an example. When Henry's grandmother bought those, she perfectly well could have bought the top, but she didn't, she bought the second. They're not nearly as valuable as if they were the elephant folio or whatever it was.

That [sailing ship] is done by an excellent artist, Joseph Lee, and it's San Francisco Bay, and that was a pilot boat The Confidence. I think it is marvelous, I really like it. He's considered very good. You don't see them much any more.

Oh, but I must tell you this! I walked into Jim Hart's office--you know, he always thought he was so knowledgeable--and behind his desk was a most wonderful painting of Alameda, just like that, very much of a primitive. I said to him, "That is a Joseph Lee." He said, "What?"

I hate to tell you, he had not heard of him! He had picked the painting because he liked the idea that it was early Alameda. So we really had a good laugh over that, because Joseph Lee is good, and did a lot of early things in California. So that was funny, and you still have that painting at the Bancroft.

It's nice, isn't it? It really is. And I think he's excellent. If I ever saw another one, I'd buy it.

VII THE BOWLES COLLECTION, CONTINUED FURTHER

[Interview 6: April 28, 1993] ##

Some Bay Area Collectors

Bowles: I'm interested that you found that book [Chelsea Porcelain at Williamsburg, by John C. Austin, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1977].

Riess: John Austin, I think when he wrote this, was president of the American Ceramic Circle. The people who started the San Francisco Ceramic Circle, I wondered if you could say anything about them: Joe Handley?

Bowles: Yes. He's an elderly man now, but he was active and a serious collector. He and his wife--they have no children--collect black and white transfer, mostly all Worcester, I believe. He's written a book on the collection. They live in Carmel. They have a wonderful house, in a way, because the walls are red, and they have black and white transfer ware against the walls, and it's stunning.

They are interested in Williamsburg, so much of the furniture in their house is American. They used to go to the seminars at Williamsburg. They're an interesting pair, the two of them.

Riess: You enjoyed them socially?

Bowles: Just occasionally really, but I liked them very much. He was active in starting the Ceramic Circle, and Henry was too, and a man named Milford Smith--I think he's passed away. He was a specialist in Bow porcelain.

Riess: And Graham Keith?

Bowles: Graham Keith was the curator of decorative arts at the Fine Arts Museums. He was knowledgeable about porcelain, the best we've ever had. He came to all the Ceramic Circle meetings. I still see him, he's still in remarkable shape, as is his wife. He's a great fly fisherman, so that makes him fun. I really enjoyed him. His wife's name is Isabel. I think like many museum people he was never paid very much. But he's had a happy life, and a simple one.

The Chelsea Botanical Plates

Riess: You told me a story on the phone about your Tiffany copies of the Hans Sloane botanical plates. I want to record that story.

Bowles: Oh, yes, that was curious. I had an elaborate dinner party the other night, sixteen people. We served a 1966 Chateau Latour wine which put people in a jolly mood.

At my table--because I have two tables, one in the breakfast room and one in the dining room--at my table was seated an old friend of mine, and I guess she was full of spirits because she picked up her plate, which was a dessert plate, and bandied it about like this [gesturing]. Right behind her, of course, are my Chelsea botanical plates in a cabinet. She wanted to show that this plate was similar to the ones behind her. [laughs]

I was a little weak, because I thought if she dropped it--! It belonged to a dozen plates that Henry had bought, made especially at Tiffany's to copy the original Chelsea botanicals. They were a special selection of plates that you could never replace. I don't think they'll ever do them again. They're not, of course, as good as the originals, but they're a limited edition of one hundred, made at Spode.

Actually, when she wrote me a thank-you note she mentioned something about how she had flailed the plate around.

Riess: But it didn't collide with anything.

Bowles: No, luckily, but it gave me a start. I think she realized it, because she wouldn't have mentioned it in her letter if she hadn't thought it was shocking. [laughter]

Riess: When were the Tiffany copies made?

Bowles: At least twenty years ago. Hans Weinberg, our dealer friend, told us about it, because he had been asked to pick out the patterns he thought would be appropriate for Tiffany. He told us about them, and Henry had to have a set. They're well-done; as I say, they're not nearly as fine as the originals, but the patterns are there.

Riess: Is it just a dessert service?

Bowles: Just a dessert--they're a little bit larger than dessert, but I use them for dessert. You could use them for salad. They're the English size, which is just a little larger, maybe an eight-inch plate as opposed to a seven-inch that we use for dessert in this country.

Hans Weinberg had a lot to do with that, because as I say, he chose the patterns. I think Tiffany's must have called him and said, "We want to do some reproduction of Chelsea plates, what do you suggest?"

Riess: It's interesting that they made a limited edition of it, and that's that?

Bowles: Yes, one hundred, but that's quite limited. And they've never been shown in a Tiffany store.

Riess: Talking about the Hans Sloanes, do you know whether yours were painted by Ehret?

Bowles: No, and I've always been curious about that, and that is why finding this book--it's just been published--makes it so interesting. I have learned some things. Apparently a man called Philip Miller was really the curator of the Chelsea Physic Garden. He was a nurseryman, but a very intelligent man who went all over the world collecting seeds and bringing back rare specimens for the Chelsea Garden.

Ehret, a painter of botanical prints, was his brother-in-law. So it was really a very close connection. Philip Miller wrote The Gardener's Dictionary, and it was published in 1750 maybe, or earlier. There were eight editions done of it over the years. It must have been very important to the botanists.

The way Hans Sloane came into the picture was that he was a very well-to-do doctor who was using many of the herbals of the Chelsea Physic Garden, because in those days they used herbs for all kinds of cures--as they are also doing more of today. So the doctor was the important person, and these two people, Ehret and Miller, were just employees of the garden. Hans Sloane owned the garden, so the plates are named for him.

I think at least four plant designs from Ehret's drawings could have been my plates, our plates. I don't know that for a fact yet, but I will look into it when I go to London. I tried once before to do it, but it really takes research.

Riess: What will you have to do, when you go to London?

Bowles: I think you could go to the library at the Chelsea Physic Garden and ask to see an Ehret portfolio, possibly, and see if any of them are similar. We all know, too, that they took artistic license and didn't copy them exactly. So I wouldn't expect to find them duplicated exactly, but certainly it would be exciting to find a similarity.

It makes it interesting for me now to know that Philip Miller went all over the world. I have a plate with a mango, and that means he must have brought some mango seeds back. As soon as he brought something back and it flowered, then Ehret did a botanical drawing. He also did etchings.

Riess: This most recent one you acquired, that you tucked into the photo book here, do you have a sense of it being like or different in technique from the others?

Bowles: Not really, I think it's quite similar. Some of most interesting have shadows behind the butterfly, and if you look closely at this, it also has a shadow. I think that is particularly significant: the really good ones often had a shadow below the butterfly to give it depth.

Connie in the Garden

Bowles: Another reason Henry and I liked the botanical plates is because we both were gardeners, and it was fun to have something that reminded you of a garden.

Riess: Both of you were gardeners?

Bowles: Yes, we loved to garden, we just had the best time gardening. Henry was very knowledgeable, and I am a serious pruner, like my father!

Riess: Was that on the ranch?

Bowles: Well, no, when we lived in Berkeley we had a wonderful garden. Then we lost interest when we moved to San Francisco, because it's

a much more difficult place to garden. But when we first lived on Russian Hill, where my daughter lives now, we just had an incredible garden. We were very young and full of enthusiasm so we really gardened a lot.

I've always loved gardening; that's what I liked about Jim Hart's house, I could garden. Berkeley is such a wonderful place to garden.

Riess: I hadn't realized that you were a passionate gardener.

Bowles: Oh, I adore it. I think it's my true love now. In a way, these [porcelains] are gone now, and I'm thrilled--I will be happy to see them in a museum, I'm so glad I gave them, I'm just delighted, because it means they're not my responsibility much any more, and I have a feeling of freedom. I like the idea that I don't have to worry about them any more.

Riess: You have more time to garden.

Bowles: Yes, now I have time to garden, which I do down in Los Banos. I was down on Monday, in fact, and brought back armloads of roses. I had some citrus trees planted. My idea of luxury today would be to have a full-time gardener and just be able to give him orders all day long. [laughs] He might be quite tired!

But I really do enjoy the outdoors and I think that getting away from material things is what I'm finding myself doing. I've always liked it, but now I feel closer to the ground and the earth. These material things have become a lot less important. I'm feeling that way about the books now, too. I'm having those all gone over, because I have 6,000 or 7,000 books in that house. They have to be distributed some way or another.

Riess: How does the pleasure of gardening compare to the other intense pleasures, like the shooting? Is it the out-of-doorsiness of it?

Bowles: I think what I really love is being outside, I always have. The skiing--and I'm going fishing this weekend, for example. I'm never happier than when I'm outside. I guess you go through phases in life. Collecting was very, very interesting, but after a while there's nothing more really that you need.

Riess: What is the look of your garden?

Bowles: In Los Banos?

Riess: Yes.

Bowles: It's just a mixture of everything under the sun, but it's mostly roses, lots of roses. I have a charming little water tower, and then a circular garden. I guess you'd call it an English border garden. That's about it. A mixture of things with a cricular lawn.

Riess: I think what I was getting to is whether you're a specialist, or whether you're eclectic. As you talked about your collection, you said that once you had a piece, you were not inclined to cull it or throw it away. I wonder how brutal you are in your garden?

Bowles: I'm somewhat brutal in the garden. I get rid of things that don't do well. In fact I'm a dreadful pruner--Henry used to kid me terribly--I prune things right down to the ground. [laughter] I would say maybe I just specialized in roses and iris. I try to put in things that do well down there, because it's a difficult place to grow things. It's hot and dry and mosquito-y, and it's just not your regular pleasure garden. But for me it is. I think it's a challenge, and I like the idea that it's a challenge.

When things do well, they do so well you have to stand back. Like pomegranates, and olives and figs, all those kind of things that are from the Mediterranean. I love that, because it's so different from anything in San Francisco. It's just overwhelming, you get so many figs and pomegranates. It's fun. Over the weekend, as I say, I planted--I didn't do it myself--I had all this citrus planted. I planted blood oranges, and all kinds of exotic citrus, so that's fun.

But I'm way off the subject.

Ground-Breaking

Bowles: I must tell you something exciting that happened this weekend, though. They had the ground-breaking for the Legion of Honor, and that was quite an occasion. That was on Sunday afternoon. I tell you, I had a weekend you wouldn't have believed! Very exciting. Dodie and John Rosekrans were there. They have given $5 million to kick off the whole scheme, and we now have the $18 million to go ahead and build the museum. So that means that in two years, maybe the Porcelain Gallery will be there--1995!

There were times when I thought, "I wonder if I'll ever live to see it." Because that's a lot of money these days. The city is coming up with some of it, and the voters part of it. So it's

all there. Now they've taken out all the asbestos, and we've had the official ground-breaking.

It was very touching, because John Rosekrans used the same gold shovel that his grandmother had used to build the Legion in 1923, I believe it was.

Riess: Is that the Spreckels family?

Bowles: Yes, the Spreckels family. But it was a memorial to the men from the First World War. And it was the Legion d'Honneur, copied from the one that is in Paris.

So it was a special occasion, with the army band and all kinds of things happening. It was really wonderful, and a nice step for me because I feel now it's really going to happen. [laughs] I guess!

Friendly Relations with Dealers, Etc.

Riess: Would you say that you and Henry were Anglophiles?

Bowles: I would say Henry really was, yes. He loved the clothes, he liked the shooting, the fishing--all the things that went with it. In a way he was a Renaissance man. He would have fit in very nicely. He loved the finer things of life. And of course, I do too.

But yes, in a way we were, and yet not boringly so, I wouldn't say, because we never really had very many English friends. We didn't really cultivate them. We did go shooting one time on Lord Hume's property, and of course, they had dinner with us every night, and that was very exciting, meeting them. But we never really made a thing of it, or ever looked them up again--I think it's always awkward, looking up people.

I thought it was a better relationship that we had, for us, at least, with Hans Weinberg, because though we became very good friends and we were really quite devoted to him, we never became socially involved. We never had dinner with him at all. When he came and stayed at our house he came as an appraiser, and he spent two nights or whatever it was. We enjoyed him very much, but we never really socialized with him in any sense of the word, which I think was a far better way to deal with someone. I didn't really want to know him well, and I think he was perfectly satisfied with our arrangement.

He had a wife I never met. Very odd.

Riess: I guess there are some touchy issues there. Mr. Crow--thank goodness for those letters in the Klepser Collection--Mr. Crow touches on them. He refers to "his other collectors," which I should think for Mr. Klepser would send shivers of horror, this reminder that it's a highly competitive business, and that it's not an exclusive relationship at all.

Mr. Weinberg's Advice, and Since

Riess: One of the things that Simon Spero comments on is the extraordinary gesture of trust on the part of Klepser to give Crow a list of all the things he wanted. In other words, putting him really at his mercy. Did you do that with Hans Weinberg, or with any of your dealers?

Bowles: No, but Mr. Weinberg knew our collection well enough so that he had his own ideas about what I should need. No, we did it, I would say, on a more emotional basis--we wanted to really love a piece. I think that was more our approach than wanting to have everything just right, and to have every piece that represented a certain period. Maybe that was the combination of the two of us that made it that way, because I value rarity, but again, I say I think it's important to love the piece you're buying and really appreciate it for the aesthetics rather than for the period or the example.

I think maybe Henry more than I, as I've said before, liked rarity. I liked it if it fit my standards. That's what I feel made it an interesting collection, the two of us not totally agreeing, and yet agreeing very much.

Riess: There wasn't the sense that you needed to fit something in here, and fit something in there.

Bowles: Not as much, no. A little bit of that, but not really. I think our overall feeling was that it was to be something we loved, and I think that really made the difference.

Studying the Shards

Riess: Bernard Watney maintains that to learn about porcelain you have to hold the pieces in your hands, feel them, and you have to look at some broken pieces and see the content.[1] Have you been able to do that?

Bowles: Yes, we have some shards at home--shards are pieces of broken porcelain--that Henry Sandon brought us. We have studied those, and looked at them carefully. I think that is important. I think porcelain is something, unlike art, that you almost have to hold and feel, as opposed to a painting. I think that is very important.

Collectors from Earlier Decades

Bowles: There was something else [in the book] about Mr. Klepser's porcelain collection: he could have a list of what he desired and send it [to his dealer] because there were many collections coming on the market--the [Rissik] Marshall Collection, for instance--and they were all coming up at auction. So he could easily say, "I want one of these and those," and get them. But when we were collecting you couldn't do that.

Riess: When he started in the mid-forties his competition was Marshall, but then Marshall died.

Bowles: Yes, and that all went into the museum at Oxford.

Riess: And Selwyn Parkinson?

Bowles: That was another collection. I don't know where that went. But the Marshall Collection is at Oxford, at the Ashmolean.

Marshall created a scandal in Europe, because he died and he left that huge collection to Oxford, and his wife was left penniless. I guess he didn't realize the taxes, or whatever it was, but it was a mess, and quite shocking to everyone.

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[1]English Blue and White of the 18th Century, Bernard Watney, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1963.

Riess: I'll read off the rest of the collectors' names because I would be interested if you and Henry had met them, visited their collections, or had pieces from them. Selwyn Parkinson?

Bowles: Yes. I think we have a piece from their collection, and it would be in the catalogue.

Riess: And Severne Mackenna.

Bowles: Oh, he was really well-known. I believe that little beaker that I often talk about, that had the crown and trident mark, I believe that might have been from the Mackenna Collection. I'm not sure.

Riess: You mean the one that is your favorite one?

Bowles: No, that one that actually was Henry's favorite one, but anyway.

Riess: This one, right.

Bowles: Yes, that's it. Now where does it say? Oh, it doesn't say. Unfortunately, we have to do more on this catalogue, because I don't think in any case they mention what collections these pieces came from. Often they had a little sticker that told where it came from.

[tape interruption]

Riess: "Beakers with this decoration are generally unmarked, although one painted with the rare crown-and-trident"--. [Austin, p. 54] It says that one was sold twice, once at Sotheby's in 1967, and again in 1971. It could very well have been your beaker.

Bowles: Yes, it could have.

Riess: It says in your photographic record that you bought it from Winifred Williams, but she could have bought it from Sotheby's.

Bowles: Oh, well, those dealers, yes, buy them from all kinds of places, so yes. But that really is very exciting. Doesn't it say something about the Mackenna right above that? Severne Mackenna, yes. So it could easily be that piece. Absolutely. That's very interesting.

Riess: Another of the collector names was Anthony Tuke, also a director of Barclays Bank, and he lived in Bayswater.

Bowles: I didn't know him. He might have been an employee or a friend of Mr. Barclay who became interested in porcelain, too. I don't know the name. [laughter]

Riess: Bank directors having a good time in the back room!

Bowles: Well, it amused me after I left because I thought, "I wonder if he's buying that for financial reasons or what?" Maybe he was, but I don't know. Anyway, wherever the collection is, I guess his children inherited it.

Riess: And Dyson Perrins?

Bowles: Dyson Perrins is the name of the Worcester Museum in Worcester, in England.

In fact, I asked the same thing when I went to the museum. I said, "Whose portrait is that?"

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Bowles: I said, "Who's that portrait at the end of the room?" when I was at the Dyson Perrins Museum, which is in Worcester and is all Worcester porcelain. They looked at me and said, "Well, that's Mr. Dyson Perrins." I said, "Perrins? Is that anything to do with Lea and Perrins sauce?"--I was just being funny, I had no idea--and of course it is. And it's named Worcestershire sauce, so when you think about it, Lea and Perrins and Worcester--can you imagine that?

It all boils down to being a good businessman, that you can do a lot of things in life, after you're a good businessman. [laughs]

Businessmen First, Then Collectors

Bowles: You know it's funny, because maybe it's true of all collectors, and it certainly was true of Mr. Klepser, they're businessmen first, they make the money, then they want to do something else with the money. They don't just want to continue in business. They decide that they want to do something more interesting, I guess, or they are really collectors underneath it all. Maybe they like collecting money first, and then they want to collect something else. It's curious.

Riess: That's interesting, I'm glad you bring it up. Is it some sense that money and making money is really not quite the pursuit that they want to be remembered for?

Bowles: It's not as satisfying, I think that's right. Or, they've been challenged, and they've met that challenge, so they want to meet another challenge. For me it's very interesting: having come from a family where they always thought hard work was the only way to succeed in life, I think it's very interesting that people, once they are successful--or at least they consider themselves successful--then they want to go on.

And you read about people all the time, like the Havemeyers, and many others. People who enjoy a challenge are from business. That interests me quite a lot, because the people that have actually made the money are ones that often are better collectors than the person that maybe inherited lots of money, and then didn't really know quite what to do with it, or maybe didn't have the strength or the courage to go through with making an interesting collection. It's a challenge to find that out. But I always like it when I find that it's a businessman underneath it all!

Riess: Something else that happens with money when you have an awful lot of it is that you start foundations.

Bowles: Yes.

Riess: Maybe that happens more--I don't know who the modern collectors are. I wonder if it's going to be as popular.

Bowles: It's not going to be, because the taxes are going to take care of everything! They're not going to be able to.

A foundation, in a way, to me, I'm sure must be satisfying, but you have to have a board and discuss what happens. You don't have the fun of doing it yourself. And in fact, the San Francisco Foundation--I'm way off the point now--but the San Francisco Foundation has people that put their money in there, and then they don't have to be bothered giving it away, because the foundation decides where it's going. I can't see that that's much fun at all! Though theoretically, you're supposed to have some input. But I mean, what's the point of having money if you don't have any fun with it? There's no point.

Riess: Yes, that's right. And porcelain collecting seems more fun, somehow, than coins and stamps, more physical perhaps.

Bowles: Yes, exactly, and how can you be lucky enough to buy paintings, for example, that you really are able to enjoy in your home, and at the same time they do things for other people? It's just a great thing.

I think it's very satisfying, and you hope that it inspires other people. Sometimes I think--one of my friends said to me, "Oh Connie, I'm so glad you've gotten rid of that collection, I found it the most awful bore." [laughs] She didn't really mean anything unkind by it, but I think she meant it. But everybody's taste is different, and that's fine.

Riess: Maybe she felt that you without the collection are just you, another woman, but you with the collection are--

Bowles: A different person. And that's one thing I hate to mention, but I'm going to mention it anyway, and that is that I've had several friends who have unfortunately died, and before they died they said to me, "I just wish that I had done something the way you have." I was a little bit shocked by that, because I didn't think I'd done anything much. But I think they have a feeling that maybe it represented the person, and you'll be leaving something that means something. I guess that's what they meant. Thinking of it that way made me feel much better.

Riess: Yes. Well, I think that's a factor.

Okay, a few more names. M. G. Kaufman of Chicago, his collection is at least half of the Chelsea collection at Williamsburg.

Bowles: Kaufman, that is not a familiar name to me at all. I really haven't heard of him.

Riess: So it must have been a lot earlier that that collection went to Williamsburg.

Bowles: I see. Well, if John Austin could charm the birds out of the trees, he could charm almost anyone. I'm sure that if Mr. Kaufman had a collection, John would have known him well and maybe that's how he got it at Williamsburg. They do have a fine collection, you really should see it sometime. It's beautifully lighted, and it's a modern museum. They've done a wonderful job. Very attractive.

Riess: Another name: a proprietor of an antique shop in Chicago, Malcolm Franklin?

Bowles: Yes. I know him well, but he mostly has furniture. I don't think he has any porcelain at all, as far as I know. Where did you hear his name mentioned? In the Klepser Collection?

Riess: Yes.

Bowles: Maybe early on he had some porcelain, but he certainly doesn't now at all, as far as I know.

Riess: I think he was someone to whom Leonard Crow was sending him pieces.

Bowles: I see. Well, he has beautiful furniture, lovely things, and I have a chair that I bought from him. But as far as I know, I've never seen any porcelain. These people--it was like Ginsburg and Levy in New York on Madison Avenue, they had some porcelain, more as a period piece on a piece of furniture, because it added a lot to the looks of the furniture. And then I guess they discovered they simply couldn't use them because they were too valuable, or they couldn't find them. I don't think Malcolm Franklin has really entered the porcelain world, unless it was way before my time, and that could have been.

Riess: And then the last one is T.G. [Tom] Burn, of Rous Lench Court.

Bowles: I've spoken to you about him. Rous Lench was in the clothing business in London. He was one of the first people in London that made a suit with two pairs of pants! It was quite shocking in London, because they were always--everything was from a bespoke tailor. He [Rous Lench] made a fortune. Everybody bought his suits madly.

So the Rous Lench Collection was right near the Worcester Museum in a home, and I told you about going to see the survivor. He was this absolute lunatic.

Riess: Tom Burn?

Bowles: I think that was his name, yes.

Riess: Oh.

It's interesting to compare aspects of the Bowles Collection with the Klepser Collection.

Bowles: It was very interesting to me to read that [essay about Klepser by Simon Spero]. It gives you an idea of what you're doing, because you're never really quite sure of what you're doing. In fact, that's one of the reasons that I've enjoyed doing this with you. It clarifies in my own mind, what am I doing? What is this all about? And so if I talk to you and bounce ideas from you, I then go home with some idea of what I'm talking about.

Riess: You have to decide what your view is of your collection, and not let the rest of us decide.

Bowles: I've had to come to terms with what I was doing. Sometimes it wasn't so easy, but I have really enjoyed it, and as I say, it has clarified it for me, too.

The Leisure Time Required in Order to be a Collector

Riess: I loved coming across the fact, as you've no doubt noticed, that Mrs. Klepser, like you, discovered Worcester china while shopping one day.

Bowles: I was so amused by that! Yes, it was marvelous, really funny.

Riess: She came home and asked her husband, and he's the one that took it and ran with it.

Why do you think it is that these porcelain collections are all associated with men?

Bowles: Well, I think the first thing is that men, when they want something, are apt to buy it, especially if they're men that think they can afford it. And the woman is much more reticent about that sort of thing. They really are. I mean, women are so much more practical. That's one reason.

I think men have the opportunity to spend more leisure time. They usually have a secretary, and they can keep track of what's happening. They can get on the telephone, they aren't having somebody come and interrupt them and say, "The dry cleaner is at the door," or whatever. A woman has all these endless details of running a house, particularly if you run a big one. There are interruptions all day long, and you aren't just down in an office where you can get on the phone or talk to the dealer, and be totally uninterrupted, and spend a lot of time looking through a catalogue.

I think it's so peaceful and quiet down in an office, I can't believe how lovely it is. No wonder men are able to do that. I mean, we never are allowed that sort of--I'm never allowed that sort of a life.

Riess: That's an absolutely fabulous slant on it! I think you're right, and yet people think that the women are home just reading a good book.

Bowles: Oh, just sitting on a sofa, yes! I love that thing you read about sitting eating chocolates and having the maid--it's a nightmare at

home. You never have a moment's peace, and in a large house, you're always having to redo something. No sooner do you get through one end of it then you have to start painting the other end of it, and the appliance man is there--I mean, it's just endless, running a house. It's like running a business, but you don't get paid for it. It's just a huge job.

And especially a house my size, it's always been--and I am a perfectionist, I have to admit that. It has to be right, or I'm not going to be able to deal with it. So I keep everything up to the last gasp, because I think that's the way it should be done. Maybe that's just an excuse, but I must say that if I had the time that men have--I mean, I've been down to my brother's office, the same thing. Sure, he has papers piled all over his desk and so forth, but all he has to do is press a button and the secretary comes running in, and he sends her off to do the thing--I mean, I think men have a very easy time of it.

Riess: Hear, hear! How did Henry do it?

Bowles: I know he worked very hard, but he also had a lot of extra time that he could do that sort of thing, and he also had the money to do it. But I was always consulted, so that was great. But yes, I think that men generally have a lot more leisure time, I really do.

A woman also, the children are all your responsibility, almost entirely. And the grandchildren then come along, and you want to do the best you can for them. It's just this constant drain, I'd call it. And always feeling guilty if you aren't doing it, always feeling guilty if you should spend, say, several hours--.

I'm not trying to sound sour, because I've been very happy with my life. But women just don't have that time, and I believe it's time that makes men--once they've been successful in business they are then able to have this free time that they think is very important, because they're collecting. And that's good: it's better than drinking, certainly, or keeping a woman, or whatever.

Riess: Did Henry do the telephoning and so on?

Bowles: He did with the auctions, yes, and he loved an auction. He adored an auction more than anything. It was fun, and Corky was going right along with him. The two of them were in the office together, so they were having a lovely time. They'd consult with me on the telephone, and we'd look over the catalogues when they came.

Riess: Perhaps a lot of the men collectors I've read about were launched by women who thought that it might not be a bad idea for these men to find something--

Bowles: [laughing] Good way to keep them out of trouble! Yes, exactly.

Bringing Taste to the Partnership

Bowles: To give Henry his due, I think he would have--he was always a collector. He was one of those people that would be a collector. But I think he felt that he would be able to include me much more obviously if it was something that I adored. So I think, looking back, it was very thoughtful of him, because I did adore it. It was something that would appeal to me, and he knew that.

I think that's touching. It really is. Because he could have just gone on collecting stamps or books or whatever, and after a while, you get so many books you don't know what to do with them. I think books are wonderful, but I have really enjoyed this, and I think one of the reasons was that Henry really wanted my taste.

That was the other thing: I have to give myself credit in this regard, and that is I think that Henry felt my taste was excellent. I never questioned that. It sounds very conceited, but I think he felt my taste was so good--oh, I'm really sounding full of myself! No, but I really mean this. I think he thought my taste was so impeccable that there was very little that I would advise him on that wasn't good. I feel that too, so that's how conceited I am.

Riess: Do you think that--now I'm going to work on this theme--do you think that it's a taste that was particularly tuned in to porcelain, or do you think that this excellent taste would have stood you in good stead with any art?

Bowles: Frankly, I think it would have, because I really--I've never spent a lot of money on paintings, but what I have bought has been superb. Furniture, the same thing. I don't know where it came from, and I feel very fortunate. But I believe that. I think that Henry's taste was good, but I think I balanced his taste. It might have been a little too much, it might have been overdone. I always wanted to keep it very low-key.

He agreed with me, so that was fine, but I think he had confidence in the way I looked at things.

Riess: And just looking at you! Every time I see you you're wonderfully dressed: your clothes are fun, and decorative. That sense of decoration would be something that would be important, and willingness to take a risk.

Bowles: That's very true. And to go a step farther, he loved my clothes. He often had them made for me, or said, "Go ahead and do that." He always liked my taste, and that's really important. I mean, when you think about it, it's terribly important, especially with somebody like Henry. It was why we were really so synchronized in a way, because he always said--. Really I never thought I was beautiful, I never have, but he said, "There's something about the way you dress that just appeals to me." So it was fun.

Riess: Do you think that you take risks that he wouldn't have thought of taking?

Bowles: Yes. I like Oriental clothes. When we were first married, I used to wear Chinese pajamas. I've never hesitated about feeling confident about what I'm wearing. I am part of what I wear. And sometimes I fail, sometimes I hate something, but not very often. Very seldom. And I've always had my clothes made. Usually I find someone that I really like that gets to know me, and I pick out the material, and that's fun for me. I've always done that. It's so crazy, but that's the way it is. I don't know whether I would have ever done it any other way.

Riess: Do you collect fabrics? Do you bring pieces back from around the world?

Bowles: My mother used to do that. She'd collect remnants. She had a whole box full of remnants that she was always going to use and never did. [laughs] But when I go traveling, oh, I'm a wild shopper. I'm absolutely wild. I love to shop in a foreign place, and I like to go alone. I've never wanted to go with anyone else. I just really like to be alone.

As I've told you before, people always say, "Why don't you take me with you?" Well, I can't, because they're asking me questions and driving me crazy. I always like to just be alone when I shop. But I do buy fabrics if I see something. I have shopped in Indonesia with my sister, and we bought a lot of things, but when I came home I didn't like any of them, I gave them all away. So I really can't shop with anyone else.

Now that I've said so much about myself, I'm a little embarrassed.

Riess: I was amused by a phrase of Simon Spero's about Mr. Klepser "...being the man he was, he promptly bought all seven." A definition of manly behavior? [laughter]

Bowles: Well, I think that is a little masculine; I don't think there's any question about it, I understand it totally.

Riess: Is it the idea of not fussing over this or that, but if we're going to do this--

Bowles: --we're going to do it right. Yes, absolutely. And he could have been wrong, of course. But apparently he was also a man of taste.

In that case, it sounded as though he was really the collector almost entirely, and she liked it, but she was a much more placid person. Didn't you get that impression?

Riess: I didn't have any impression of her at all.

Bowles: Neither did I! [laughter] I kept thinking, "Where is the poor woman?" And that's one thing, I don't want to leave an impression with you--. I must tell you, I've had many people come to me and say, "Oh, well, Connie, it was really Henry's collection, you just went along for the ride, didn't you?" And I really bristle at that, because I don't feel that it was entirely his collection at all!

I said, "It was not our joint collection, it was my collection, because it was my taste. It might have been our money, but it was my taste." And what's more important? You don't buy taste. You just don't go out and buy it. You have to know, and you have to feel. It's mine. [laughs] Even though it's in the museum, it's mine.

It's like clothes. You pick out the fabric, and you make the design, and even if someone else pays for it, it's your dress. That's, I think, the way I feel about the collection.

But it has been true that people are always trying to say about women, "Oh, well, it was really her husband, you know." That just irritates me. Because I don't feel that about it. I think it was a joint thing, but I think it was more mine. I really do.

Riess: Because china is domestic, I would have thought of china and china collecting as a woman's activity. So I was startled to find very powerful businessmen associated with it.

Bowles: Well, I must say that I loved John Rosekrans' comment. (He is such a male creature and a wonderful person.) Dodie, his wife, is interested in a number of things, and she has shown a lot of interest in the porcelain and the collection and coming to the museum and all that sort of thing. When John was down in Carmel one day, somebody said, "Where's Dodie?" He said, "Oh, she's over tiptoeing among some teacups over at the Handleys'." That was John's idea, absolutely torment to be tiptoeing among the teacups!

Riess: That's right, the bull in the china shop.

Bowles: Right.

Riess: And that is the sense that may rule one's image of porcelain-collecting, the bull in the china shop.

Bowles: Absolutely, and it's not masculine, it's a very effeminate kind of thing. And I must say that the men that I have met that are porcelain collectors are somewhat effeminate, there's no question about it. But then, after all, I'm interested in shooting and fishing. So there we are.

But I still think that the makeup of the porcelain is what interests men more than the aesthetics of it. I feel that underneath it all, that's really more of their real interest. Although maybe not with Mr. Klepser.

Riess: Was that true of Henry?

Bowles: Yes, I think that interested him a lot, using the ultraviolet light and seeing if there were any repairs, or if it fluoresced, and all that sort of thing. That fascinated him. It interested me quite a bit, I thought it was sort of exciting, but it didn't interest me nearly as much as the real article that was right there, and the aesthetics.

The Link with the Past

Riess: We've talked throughout these interviews about collectors, and what it's all for. What do you think compels the true collector of Worcester porcelain or Chelsea porcelain? In Henry Sandon's preface to the Klepser Collection he has his hypothesis.

Bowles: What were his three things? I didn't read that.

Riess: The excitement of building up the collection, the pleasure to be had in living with it, and the joy in being able to share it with others. One of those might predominate. Building it up, living with it, or sharing it with others.

Bowles: Yes, at different times one has distinct feelings. Looking at the long run, I guess my hope, and Henry's hope, would be that people would become interested in it, because it does represent the kind of people that lived in the 18th century in England. They were at their peak in England in those days: the furniture was splendid, and the silver was marvelous.

I think that's the thing that I would hope that we'd be leaving with this collection, is the study of what these 18th-century English people were like. How did they produce these incredibly beautiful things under all kinds of obstacles, going bankrupt, being exposed to lead, dying of poisoning at an early age--? I mean, in spite of everything, they produced porcelains that were so imaginative and really, in a way, better than Meissen. That's what I'm hoping that this will inspire young people to understand.

Riess: That's very intellectualized. Could we just say that you really adored collecting 18th century English porcelains? Or did it really have to do with the history?

Bowles: I think I felt that it represented those 18th-century people, and I really would love to know more about them. As I've said before, I should read more about them. But yes, that is my hope.

Riess: The link with the past.

Bowles: Yes. I like that idea. And I think that that's why they're going to have this study center at the Legion.

I might have collected Meissen, or just anything that was beautiful. But I don't feel that [connection]. I feel that the link with the past is interesting, and that it is historically significant, because it was such an unusual period in England. I think that's what I really feel.

Bow in the Bowles Collection

Riess: We haven't talked much about your Bow pieces.

Bowles: The Bow was really not terribly appealing to me--I thought it was rather heavy, and clumsy. It was relatively inexpensive. Now, these two platters are the ones that I told you that I first told Henry about them, and I took Henry out to the shop on Clement Street, and he bought them both. I was just absolutely aghast. [laughs] But they're wonderful platters, and they have the Chinese imitation marks on the back of them. They're a very interesting pair that I still adore.

Riess: Well, what about the quail design pieces? I can't tell, looking at the photograph. It is heavy?

Bowles: Yes, it's quite heavy. And that pattern, of course, they did in Worcester too. If you compare it [the Bow], it's not as charmingly done. It's something Worcester did a little bit better. The palette is much the same as Worcester, though, that same iron-rust red, as they call it, and the blue. If you could handle it and see it you'd know what I'm saying. It was always sort of heavily potted. Now, that's a very sweet piece, I think. But it doesn't have the flair or the imagination, as far as I'm concerned.

Developments in the Bowles Collection ##

Riess: From Mrs. Ashley you bought black transfer overglaze pieces. What was the--?

Bowles: The reason for buying the transfer? Well, it was interesting because of the way it was done--the fact that it was transfer ware was interesting. It has a charm of its own. I don't think we ever were enthused by that [black and white], but we were intrigued by the idea that in the progression of making porcelain that was a huge step, that instead of having to paint by hand, they were transferring a pattern onto porcelain.

That was as though they had invented the typewriter, practically. It was a very big step. So that, I think, was more of an example. We were buying these for examples of transfer ware. And yet, they have a charm too. Transfer ware is what Joe Handley collects entirely. I think that's very monotonous, just a whole room full of transfer! I mean, really, even though he does have red walls.

I think to collect anything exclusively without a progression is also rather dull. In fact, I even think Mr. Klepser's sticking

with Worcester--although we did try to stay--. I'll have to correct myself in a way. We did stay within a period. But I think it's nicer to have broader examples in that period, rather than just Worcester. Because then you see what other people of the time period were producing.

That's the other point I want to make. The blue and white was probably for people that really couldn't afford very much. And then in the same period other people had Chelsea, which was the top of the line, so to speak. So the aesthetics is still there of the people that couldn't afford much but they were thrilled with their blue and white, which I was thrilled with too, until I saw the Chelsea. These were all people living in the same period. So you're seeing a diversity of humanity, from the very lowest to the highest, they still--their standards were aesthetically incredibly good.

I may have made that up in the last five minutes, but I don't think so! [laughs]

Riess: Do you think that collectors tend to start with the simple because it's "safe?" I think of the first silver that I bought. We were taught that simple--

Bowles: --things are safe, yes. And in fact, my sister--neither one of my sisters are especially interested, but they glance at it. She said, "Oh, I can't stand those things with gold on them." And I was hurt. It's because she doesn't know. Because the gold was not like the gold that we see today on china. The gold was all done by honey gold; they had to put honey on it and do it all by hand. It wasn't just gold. But she didn't really realize that, and she didn't take the time to learn, and I didn't bother to tell her.

But it's true that you become a little more sophisticated, and you do want to move along. And you're more sure of your taste, that's the other thing. When you begin anything, you're very unsure. "Do I want to have something that looks ostentatious? I am such a simple person, I don't want anything that looks too elaborate." But then you gradually get used to the whole idea of it, and it's lovely. [laughs]

Getting used to something is--well, that's a discussion that I had with Simon Spero. I'm afraid I hurt his feelings a little bit, because I said, "But Simon, your taste is so sophisticated. You only like blanc-de-Chine. And I'm really not sure I even understand it much, and I don't think it has any color. I don't think I like it very much."

I really do feel blanc-de-Chine is very sophisticated. I still don't like it as well as things with color, but it is a whole other, very interesting thing to collect.

Riess: And you've got one or two pieces.

Bowles: I have one or two pieces, and I adore them, I really do. But I think that it's fun to have a mixture. I think that's very important. And there's a limit to simplicity! There's just a limit, as far as I'm concerned.

But the other very interesting thing about Worcester, or all of this period, is that shortly after this they went into the neo-classic period, and it was so ugly and kind of stiff. They lost the whole feeling of it. Why that happens, I don't know. But I feel that we were so lucky, because we knew what we were doing. What a thrill, to be able to buy it before it went downhill.

Favorites

Riess: If you were to be able to get into all your boxes at the Legion of Honor, which things would you want to have to play with?

Bowles: Oh, you're terrible to ask me a thing like that! Well, I parted with as much as I could, and I kept home the few things that I really adore, which will eventually go.

But one of my favorite pieces out there is that little Worcester cream jug with the cover. The painting is so charming, with two little children playing with a balloon, and a pipe. Here it is [Worcester 80], I just adore it. It was supposed to be done by James Giles, but in the style of Tenniers, who was a wonderful artist. It's so bucolic, a wonderful piece, and so beautifully painted, so restrained, so imaginative. Children in a rural landscape. Everything about it is right. I can't believe that there was ever a whole set of that. Maybe there was. I've certainly seen a teapot, and a sugar bowl came up not too long ago, I did see in a catalogue, and it went right away.

I think that's a delightful piece, enchanting. And everything about it is so typically restrained and Worcester. The little knop is a perfect knop. The little indentations of gold--that is all honey gold, they had to do that--it's just complete in every way.

I sometimes wonder, if I'd looked closely, if I could have seen some initials someplace, because it is said the artists often put initials in with the rocks or in with the background, but I haven't seen one. But look at the birds flying over, and the wonderful imaginative tree. And the children are so adorable, and the clothes they're wearing are typical of the period. Well, I can't say enough nice things about it!

Riess: Can you remember anything about the acquisition of it?

Bowles: I think we bought it at auction, because it was a very good picture, and I think that I said, "I want that." [laughter] And he [Henry] bought it for me.

Riess: What other pieces do you particularly miss? The ones you kept at home, of course, are the Chelsea botanicals.

Bowles: Well, I gave two to the Legion, but I kept two or three at home. I bought one since, so I have three now. Maybe if I find another one, I might buy it. In fact, I called London the other day. It's awfully difficult to buy something without seeing it. The dealer, Mrs. George, had a good colored picture of it, but I liked one of them, and she said she liked the one on the right-hand side better. And I thought, well, for that sort of money I want to be sure. Maybe when I go to London, it will still be there.

Half the fun of it really is to see the piece before you buy it. It's nice buying at auction, and you can't do it any other way, but since I don't have to buy that much, for me now the thrill of it is to actually be able to pick it up and handle it and see it. I'm disappointed otherwise.

Riess: Are some new things coming on to the market?

Bowles: They had a little show the other day, Mrs. George from Amor sent me a catalogue. An exhibit, she calls it. Of course, everything is for sale. The catalogue came on a Monday--they had sent it on a Friday, I think--and already when I called a lot of the good pieces had been sold. They were just gone, that's it. So it's very hard.

Riess: You have to make an instant decision?

Bowles: You have to make a decision then and there. If you don't, it's going to be gone. There are just that few. I was thrilled that I bought another Hans Sloane plate, but I didn't realize that it was a little bit smaller than the other pieces that I have. I'm glad I have it, I wouldn't have sent it back, but if I had seen it I

wouldn't have--I probably would have bought it anyway. But it's just nice to be able to see the piece; I think that helps a lot.

Riess: There is a lot of variation in size.

Bowles: Yes, and we have a very large botanical plate. I really didn't like it as well, because it was so large. I don't like things that are too large a scale.

Now, I'm very fond of this: this isn't the rarest thing in the world, but I love it because of the yellow, and I think it's very bucolic [Worcester 75]. I guess I really like country things, because I love Staffordshire, for example. But I love the scene of the cow there, and the whole feeling of it, and the mask.

That's what Worcester always did so well, the mask jug, as they called it. And this wonderful handle, that's just enough decorative, and yet not too. The proportions are good. The little bug here, and the butterfly there. I just think that is a wonderful piece. It's from a Hancock engraving, "The Rustic Lovers"--I guess the rustic lovers are on the other side, and here's the milkmaids on this side.

But this part was done with transfer, and then it was hand-colored in. So it's not just the rarest thing, but it's wonderfully done. The gilding is so restrained, too, just a little bit. And it's a wonderful shade of yellow, and everything seems to tie together, to me. They call that a cabbage leaf. Just their simplicity and their--I don't know, they had a wonderful sense of proportion. So I love that piece.

And I think that funnel [Worcester 12] is especially interesting because you know that maybe they really used it. It's kind of exciting to see something that they might have really used, and of course, they're very rare, because so few of them survived, I suppose. Maybe they didn't make that many.

The Duke of Gloucester Service

Bowles: What else can I tell you? This [Worcester 65] is very choice, and incidentally, right now it's being sold at Gump's by Mrs. Motahedda, who has pieces copied in Portugal. This is going to be common, the Duke of Gloucester service. And it surprises me to see it, it's fun to see it, but of course, the real--.

My plate is just sensational, the apple is so beautifully done. It's really a marvelous piece. And I believe it was after we bought that that we bought the bowl that is the same pattern. It's in here somewhere.

Riess: In that case, were you looking for a piece of the Duke of Gloucester service?

Bowles: No, not at all. The Duke of Gloucester apparently loved porcelain, and he backed the Worcester factory for a while. So that was why they named the service after him. But that is a wonderful pattern. Again, they've got the butterflies and the fruit. It's really wonderfully done.

Yes [looking at example from the Klepser Collection, color plate 19], that's the same thing. I happen to like mine better. I think that's sort of ugly. I don't think that turquoise blue goes with the plate very well, but anyway, it's there. And I don't like that shape. And it's only a teapot stand; he should have the tureen that goes with it, and he doesn't have that.

This [Worcester 65] is so much better. The apple is so beautifully done, it's better balanced, the colors are better. Well, we have the turquoise here, and why they did that I don't know, but it's all right. It's all right for me. I like this [Bowles piece], but I don't like that [Klepser piece] as well. Let me put it that way. I think that's very pretty, but I don't think it's as good. I think this is snappier, and it's crisper. It really looks like a crisp apple. And the bowl is in here somewhere [Worcester 45].

I never liked that especially, that yellow plate [Worcester 61]. And you see, there's an example of buying something at auction. Mr. Weinberg bought it, and we wanted some yellow ground. I don't know, I didn't like the lavender with the yellow. Somehow, it didn't strike me as quite right. But that's all right, we bought it, and it's very nice. It's a wonderful shade of yellow, and we're very fortunate to have it.

More Favorites

Riess: I was surprised by the turquoise cup and saucer [Worcester 48].

Bowles: You mean the plain cup and saucer? Well again, they were trying to copy Meissen, but it was such a difficult color to get. That was so exciting for them, to be able to get that color and get it

so clearly. Just the simplicity of it is what's beautiful about it. I think it's a beautiful piece.

Riess: So in that case, it's largely the achievement--

Bowles: It's the achievement of--

Riess: --of manufacturing in that period.

Bowles: Right. Because they didn't have any financial backing. And then, of course, they put the mark on it, the crossed swords, to look like Meissen, because that was the typical Meissen mark. Bleu celeste is a beautiful color--this really doesn't show it--it is so lovely when you see it, it's just marvelous. I think it's fine just the way it is.

He had one too, didn't he, Mr. Klepser?

Riess: Yes.

Now we are looking at the apple-green mug [Worcester 47].

Bowles: Yes. I want to show you about the gold, because they make a big thing of it. You see how that gold does not touch the color at all? That had to be done so carefully, otherwise it would run into the color. That had to be done by hand. It wasn't the way they have gold on things today, it was really carefully done.

Oh, one other thing I was going to say, this teapot [Worcester 27] was so much fun for me to buy. I bought it from Adele Morton--I can't believe it's 1968, but I guess it was--and I did pay $275 for it. Well, for me--and I just thought it was heavenly, I didn't care what it cost, I adored it.

But then I guess it was in the Antique Porcelain shop or some other shop where I found the plate that goes with it--or doesn't necessarily go with it, but it's the same pattern [Worcester 32]. We paid a lot more for it [$1280], but it was so worth it, because you say to yourself, "I got such a bargain the first time that I'll be glad to pay whatever it is this time."

It was quite a thrill to see it again. And then we found another piece, the sucrier [Worcester 46], in the same pattern. So we had three pieces in that pattern. They should all be together, and I think they will be in the catalogue, but it's all mixed up here. Isn't that fun, to have those three? And it's so charming, the quail pattern--because we were quail hunters it was really nice.

Oh, I get excited when I see these things! I want to go buy some more things! [laughs]

This [Worcester 41] is what started to happen to Worcester porcelain as it went along, and I think it's very ugly. I think we have it because we bought it as an example of what happened, and how they developed into that neo-classic period, but it was very ugly. I knew then that I thought it was ugly, but I bought it because I thought that that is what happened to Worcester when it started to go downhill. And it's true, it really did. It just started to be boring and stiff.

Riess: That's so interesting that you would buy it for that reason. Do you think that you and Henry would have kind of argued about that one?

Bowles: Oh, we did a little, yes. I said, "I really don't like it, but if you want it, let's get it, that's fine." Because it's an example of what I don't like, and it looks sort of funereal, and it's grim, and it's just not my style. But I think it's nice to have it for an example. You think I'm peculiar?

Riess: No, no!

You think that people will look at this collection and wonder how people lived in the 18th century. I think they'll also look at the collection and be interested in how the Bowleses, the collectors, made these decisions in the 20th century.

Bowles: Yes, you like to think that. I think that's a nice idea. Or how did they make the decision at all, is more to the point.

Oh, it's so much fun for me to be able to go over it with you. You know, I'm really enjoying this.

Here's another piece I have to confess that I love, [Worcester ?] and it doesn't show as well in the picture, but I think it's perfectly beautiful. Again, the restraint is so incredible. And it's thought to be a factory copy of a Japanese service. It is so Japanese, it really is. That appeals to me, because I love Oriental things, but the blue and the green and the butterflies, the whole thing is just a masterpiece, I think.

Riess: Have you ever seen anything like it anywhere else?

Bowles: I don't remember.

Riess: It is remarkable how few of the pieces in your Worcester collection echo the Klepser Collection, and that it's possible to be collecting in this field and have it look wholly different.

Bowles: I know, it's interesting. Mr. Klepser--he was a good collector, and I think it was an interesting thing that he did, but I think it would have been a lot more interesting collection if his wife had been in on the decisions. [laughing] In fact, he should have called me! But I think that about a lot of things, though. I think it takes two people to really make a collection interesting, because your differences are what make it come alive. That's my feeling.

It is like a marriage, in a sense. Your differences is what makes it interesting, and if the differences are too great, forget it.

The Chelsea Strawberry Dish ##

Riess: You really have the best of the strawberry dishes [Chelsea 5].

Bowles: I really do, yes. That's very good. The story about that is that Henry went down to get it at the customs place, and he said, "If you could have seen the look on the man's face when he unwrapped that," because you have to unwrap it when it comes to the customs. He looked at him, and he said, "You mean you paid that for that?" [laughter] How much was it?

Riess: Twelve hundred dollars.

Bowles: Twelve hundred dollars. Henry said the man thought he was a lunatic, absolute lunatic.

Henry would always go down and pick up the things at customs, because that he thought was fun to do, and I never wanted to do it.

Riess: I wonder if he always dealt with the same customs person?

Bowles: Actually, we did, and in fact we finally had a man come to visit us. What was that about? We got to know him so well. He was a Japanese-American, I think.

Riess: Yes, I think I know him. I interviewed him when I did the Richard Gump oral history.[2]

Bowles: He couldn't have been nicer, and he came out to the house. I guess they chose him because nobody else would know anything, and this man was quite knowledgeable. I can't think of his name. [Ken Kojima]

Riess: This "Goat and Bee" jug. How come the leaves on yours are not broken?

Bowles: Because we were so clever. [laughter]

Riess: In other examples the leaves seem to have crumbled off. I wondered whether--you would know if they had been repaired, wouldn't you, because it would say that?

Bowles: Yes. But we were at the Victoria and Albert Museum one day, and John Mallett, who incidentally has just been here--I had lunch with him on Friday--he took us in a back room and opened a cabinet, and there must have been twenty "Goat and Bee" jugs. A lot of them were copies, because people had copied it, it's so famous. And a lot of them are bigger sizes, and this and that.

So it's hard to know, but we always tried to get a perfect one. There were quite a lot of them done, and as you know, it was [Nicholas] Sprimont [who modeled it]. He was a French Hugenot silversmith, and it's really--I've always thought maybe you could find one in silver, but somebody said to me, "You'll never find it," so I guess I wouldn't. Maybe one was never done in silver. But that is interesting. I think ours is especially well-proportioned, and I've seen all kinds of different ones that are heavier-looking and not as well-proportioned.

Riess: The Klepser catalogue is divided into periods of Worcester, by date, and also by glazes and colors and decoration. Do you have any idea how you would like to do yours?

Bowles: I think it's very difficult to do that, so many things overlap that it's very hard to say exactly. And of course, Klepser's collection being all Worcester maybe made it easier. And he culled his blue and white porcelain in the mid-fifties out of necessity of getting more space.

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[2] Richard B. Gump, Composer, Artist, and President of Gump's, San Francisco, The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1989.

Riess: Did you ever meet Mr. Klepser?

Bowles: No. I was going to go up with Graham Keith to Seattle at one time to see the collection, but I didn't go, and then he died, and I believe Mrs. Klepser has also died. If I ever go up to Seattle again, I'd like to see the collection, wherever it is.

Riess: It's not in a museum?

Bowles: No, I don't think so. No, the catalogue was for an exhibit that I believe was done in Minneapolis and in San Francisco. But the collection was never given, and they're not sure what they're going to do with it. Yes, that's interesting. I don't know what's going to happen. I have no idea.

Transcribed and Final Typed by Shannon Page

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